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WEAVERS AND WEFT

And other Tales

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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WEAVERS AND WEFT.

JOHN GRANGER.

CHAPTER II.

JOHN GRANGER'S preparations and arrangements, the disposal of his property, and the getting together of his simple outfit, occupied little more than three weeks; and it was still bright midsummer weather when he took his last walk round the pastures of Friarsgate, and, for the first time since he had resolved to leave those familiar scenes, realized how great a hold they had upon his heart.

'It 'll be dreary work in a strange country,' he thought, as he leaned upon a gate, looking at the lazy cattle which were no longer his, and wondering

whether they would miss him when he was gone; 'and what pleasure can I ever take in trying to get rich!—I who have no one to work for, no one to take pride in my success? Perhaps it would have been better to stay here, even though I had to hear her wedding bells some fine summer morning, and see her leaning on Robert Ashley's arm, and looking up in his face as I used to fancy she would look up to me in all the years to come. O God, how I wish I was dead! What an easy end that would make of everything!'

He thought of the men and women who had died of a fever last autumn round about Hillborough—people who had wished to live, for whom life was full of duties and household joys; whose loss left wide gaps among their kindred, not to be filled again upon this earth. If death would come to him, what a glad release! It was not that he suffered from any keen or violent agony; it was the dull blankness of his existence which he felt—an utter emptiness and hopelessness; nothing to live for in the present, nothing to look forward to in the future.

This was the last day. His three great sea chests, containing his clothes, books, and other property which he could not bring himself to part with, had gone on to London by that morning's luggage train. He had arranged to follow himself by the night mail, which left Hillborough Station at half-past nine, and would be in London at two o'clock next morning. At the last he had been seized with a fancy for prolonging his time to the uttermost, and it was for this reason he had chosen the latest train by which he could leave Hillborough. He had a good many people to take leave of, and it was rather trying work. He had always been liked and respected, and on this last day it surprised him to find how fond the people were of him, and how general was the regret caused by his departure. Little children clung about his knees, matronly eyes were dried in lavender cotton aprons, pretty girls offered blushingly to kiss him at parting; stalwart young fellows, his companions of old, declared they would never have a friend they could trust and honour as they had trusted and honoured him. It touched the poor fellow to the heart to

find himself so much beloved. And he was going to sacrifice all this, because he could not endure to live in the old home now his dream was broken.

He had put off his visit to Matthew Lorton's house to the very last. His latest moments at Hillborough should be given to Susan, he told himself. He would drain to the last drop the cup of that sweet, sad parting. His last memory of English soil should be her bright tender face looking at him compassionately, as she had looked the day she broke his heart.

It was half-past seven when he went in at the little garden gate. A warm summer evening, the rustic garden steeped in the low western sunshine; the birds singing loud in hawthorn and sycamore; a peaceful vesper calm upon all things. John Granger had been expected. He could see that at a glance. The best tea-things were set out in the best parlour, and Mr. Lorton and his daughter were waiting tea for him. There was a great bunch of roses on the table, and Susan was dressed in light blue muslin, with a rose in her bosom. He thought how often in the dreary time to come she would arise before him

like a picture, with the sunshine flickering about her bright hair, and the red rose at her breast.

She was very sweet to him that evening, tender and gentle and clinging, as she might have been with a fondly loved brother who was leaving her for ever. The farmer asked him about his plans, and gave his approval of them heartily. It was well for a sturdy fellow with a bit of money to push his way in a new country, where he might make fifty per cent. upon his capital, instead of dawdling on in England, where it was quite as much as a man could do to make both ends meet at the close of a year's hard work.

'My little Susy is going to be married to young Bob Ashley,' Mr. Lorton said by-and-by. 'He asked her last Tuesday was a week; but they've been courting in a kind of way this last twelvemonth. I couldn't well say no, for Bob's father and I have been friends for many a year, and the young man's a decent chap enough. He's going to rent that little dairy farm of Sir Marmaduke Halliday's on the other side of Hillborough Road. Old Ashley has promised to stock it for him, and he hopes to do

well. It isn't much of a match for my girl, you know, John; but the young people have made up their minds, so it's no use setting my face against it.'

They had been sitting at the tea-table nearly half an hour, when the sunny window was suddenly darkened by the apparition of Mr. Stephen Price looking in upon them in an easy familiar manner, with his folded arms upon the sill.

'Good evening, uncle Lorton,' he said. 'Good evening, Susy. How do, Granger? I didn't know there was going to be a tea-party, or I shouldn't have come.'

'It isn't a tea-party,' answered Susan; 'it is only John Granger, who has come to bid us good-bye, and we are very, very sorry he is going away.'

'Oh, we are, are we?' said the lawyer's clerk, with a sneer; 'what would Bob Ashley say to that, I wonder?'

'Come in, Steph, and don't be a fool,' growled the old man.

Mr. Price came in, and took his seat at the tea-table. He was flashily dressed, wore his hair long,

and had a good deal of whisker, which he was perpetually caressing with a hand of doubtful cleanliness, whereon the inky evidence of his day's work was unpleasantly obvious.

He did not care much for such womanish refreshment as tea, which he denounced in a sweeping manner as 'cat-lap;' but he took a cup from his cousin nevertheless, and joined freely in the conversation while he drank it.

He asked John Granger a good many questions about his plans—whether he meant to buy land, and when, and where, and a great deal more in the same way—to all of which John replied as shortly as was consistent with the coldest civility.

'You take all your capital with you, of course?' asked Stephen Price.

'No; I take none of my capital with me.'

'Why, hang it all, man, you must take some money!'

'I take the money I received for my furniture and stock.'

'Ah, to be sure; you came to the office yesterday afternoon to receive it? Over six hundred pounds,

wasn't it? I drew up the agreement between you and the new man; so I ought to know.'

'It was over six hundred pounds.'

'And you take that with you? Quite enough to start with, of course. And the rest of your money is as safe as houses in old Lawler's bank. No fear of any smash there. I wish I was going with you, Granger. I'm heartily sick of Hillborough. I shall cut old Vollair's office before very long, come what may. I can't stand it much longer. I've got a friend on the look-out for a berth for me up in London, and directly I hear of anything I shall turn my back upon this dismal old hole.'

'You'll have to pay your debts before you do that, I should think, Steph,' his uncle remarked, bluntly.

Stephen Price shrugged his shoulders, and pushed his teacup away with a listless air. He got up presently and lounged out of the house, after a brief good evening to all. He made no attempt to take leave of John Granger, and seemed in his careless way to have forgotten that he was parting with him for the last time. No one tried to detain him. They seemed to breathe more freely when he was gone.

John and Susan wandered out into the garden after tea, while the farmer smoked his pipe by the open window. The sun was low by this time, and the western sky flooded with rosy light. The garden was all abloom with roses and honeysuckle. John Granger fancied he should never look upon such flowers or such a garden again.

They walked up and down the narrow path once or twice almost in silence, and then Susan began to tell him how much she regretted his departure.

'I don't know how it is, John,' she said, 'but I feel to-night as if I would give all the world to keep you here. I cannot tell you how sorry I am you are going. Oh, John, I wish with all my heart I could have been what you asked me to be. I wish I could have put aside all thoughts of Robert.'

'Could you have done that, Susan?' he cried, with sudden energy.

His fate trembled upon a breath in that moment. A word from Susan, and he would have stayed; a word from her, and he would never have taken the path across the common and through the wood to Hillborough on that fair summer evening. He

was her valued friend of many years; dearer to her than she had known until that moment. It seemed to her all at once that she had thrown away the gold, and had chosen—not dross, but something less precious than that unalloyed gold.

It was too late now for any change.

'I have promised Robert to be his wife,' she said; 'but oh, John, I wish you were not going away.'

'My dear love, I could not trust myself to stay here; I love you too much for that. But I will come back when I am a sober elderly man, and ask for a corner beside your hearth.'

'Promise me that. And you will write to me from America, won't you, John? I shall be so anxious, and father too, to know that you are safe and well.'

'Yes, my dear, I will write.'

'What is the name of the steamer you are to go in?'

'The *Washington*, bound for New York.'

'I shall not forget that—the *Washington*.'

John Granger looked at his watch. The sun had

gone down, and there was a long line of crimson yonder in the west above the edge of the brown furze-grown common. Beyond it, the wood dipped down, and the tops of the trees made a black line against that red light. Above, the sky was of one pale tender green, with stars faintly shining here and there.

'What a lovely night!' said Susan.

John Granger sighed as he looked at that peaceful landscape.

'I did not know how much I loved this place and all belonging to it,' he said. 'Good night, Susy; good night, and good-bye.'

'Won't you kiss me the last time, John?' she said, shyly.

She scarcely knew what she had asked. He took her in his arms, strained her to his breast, and pressed one passionate, despairing kiss upon her brow. It was the first and last in his life.

'Time's up, Susy,' he said, gently releasing her.

He went to the window, shook hands with the farmer, and took leave of him in that quiet, undemonstrative way which means a good deal with a man of

John Granger's mould. A minute more, and he was gone.

Susan stood at the garden-gate, watching the tall dark figure crossing the common. Twice he turned and waved his hand to her,—the last time upon the edge of the common, before he took the path down to the wood. After this night the still twilight hour seldom came without bringing the thought of him to Susan Lorton.

It seemed to grow dark all at once when he was gone, and the house had a dreary look to Susan when she went indoors. What was it that made her shiver as she crossed the threshold? Something—some nameless, shapeless fancy shook her with a sudden fear. Her father had strolled out to the garden through the wide open back door. The house seemed quite empty, and the faint sound of the summer wind sighing in the parlour chimney was like the lamentation of a human creature in pain.

CHAPTER III.

THE summer passed, and in the late autumn came Susan's wedding day. She was very fond of her good-looking generous-hearted young suitor, and yet even on the eve of her marriage her heart had turned a little regretfully towards absent John Granger. She was not a coquette, to glory in the mischief her beauty had done. It seemed to her a terrible thing that a good man should have been driven from his home for love of her.

She had thought of him a great deal since that summer night upon which he had looked back at her on the verge of Hawley Wood—all the more because no letter had come from him yet, and she was beginning to be a little anxious about his safety. She thought of him still more, by and by, as the winter months passed without bringing the promised letter. Her husband made light of her fears, telling her that

John Granger would find plenty to do in a new country, without wasting his time in scribbling letters to old friends. But this did not convince Susan.

'He promised to write, Robert,' she said; 'and John Granger is not the man to break his promise.'

Susan was very happy in her new home, and Robert Ashley declared he had the handiest, brightest, and most industrious wife in all Woodlandshire, to say nothing of her being the prettiest. She had been used to keeping her father's house since her early girlhood, and her matronly duties came very easy to her. The snug little farmhouse, with its neat furniture and fresh dimity draperies, was the prettiest thing possible in the way of rustic interiors; the Dutch-tiled dairy was like a temple dedicated to some pastoral divinity, and Susan took a natural womanly pride in this bright home. She had come from as good a house; but then this was quite her own, and young Robert Ashley was a more romantic figure in the foreground of the picture than her good humdrum old father.

Stephen Price did not stay at Hillborough long

enough to see his cousin's wedding. He left Mr. Vollair's employment about three weeks after John Granger's departure, and left without giving his employer any notice of his intention.

He went away from Hillborough as deeply in debt as it was practicable for a young man in his position to be, and the tradesmen to whom he owed money were loud in their complaints about him.

He was known to have gone to London, and there were some attempts made to discover his whereabouts. But in that mighty metropolis it was no easy thing to find an obscure lawyer's clerk, and nothing resulted from the endeavours of his angry creditors, except the mortification of defeat, which made them still more angry. No one, except those to whom he owed money, cared what had become of him. He had been considered pleasant company in a tavern parlour, and his manners and dress had been copied by some aspiring clerks and apprentices in Hillborough; but he had never been known to do any one a kindness, and his disappearance left no empty place in any heart.

The new year came, and still there was no letter from John Granger. But early in January Robert

Ashley came home from Hillborough market one afternoon, and told his wife she needn't worry herself about her old friend any longer.

'John Granger's safe enough, my lass,' he said. 'I was talking to Simmons, the cashier at Lawler's bank, this morning, and he told me that Granger wrote to them for a thousand pounds last November from New York, and he has written for five hundred more since. He is buying land somewhere—I forget the name of the place—and he's well and hearty, Simmons tells me.'

Susan clapped her hands joyfully.

'Oh, Robert, how glad I am!' she cried. 'It isn't kind of John to have forgotten his promise; but I don't care about that as long as he's safe.'

'I don't know why you should ever take it into your head that there was anything amiss with him,' said Robert Ashley, who did not regard John Granger's exile from a sentimental point of view.

'Well, I'm afraid I'm rather fanciful, Bob; but I could never explain to you what a strange feeling came over me the night John Granger went away

from Hillborough. It was after I had said good-bye to him, and had gone back into the house, where all was dark and quiet. I sat in the parlour thinking of him, and it seemed as if a voice was saying in my ear that neither I, nor any one that cared for him, would ever see John Granger again. There wasn't any such voice, of course, you know, Robert, but it seemed like that in my mind; and whenever I've thought of poor John Granger since that time, it has seemed to me like thinking of the dead. Often and often I've said to myself, "Why, Susan, you foolish thing, you ought to know that he's safe enough out in America. Ill news travels fast; and if there'd been anything wrong, we should have heard of it somehow." But, reason with myself as I would, I have never been able to feel comfortable about him; and thank God for your good news, Robert, and thank you for bringing it to me.'

She raised herself on tiptoe to kiss her husband, who looked down at her in a fond, protecting way from the height of his own wisdom.

'Why, Susy, what a timid, nervous little puss you are!' he said. 'I should have been getting

jealous of John Granger by this time if I'd known you thought so much of him.'

The winter days lengthened, and melted into early spring. It was bright March weather, and Susan had an hour of daylight after tea for her needlework, while Robert attended to his evening duties out of doors. They had fires still, though the days were very mild; and Susan used to sit at the open window, with a jug of primroses on the wide wooden ledge before her, executing some dainty little repairs upon her husband's shirts.

One evening Robert Ashley was out later than usual, and when it had grown too dark for her to work any longer, Susan sat with her hands lying idle in her lap thinking—thinking of her wedded life, and the years that had gone before it—years that she could never recall without the image of John Granger, who had been in a manner mixed up with all her girlish days. It had been very unkind of him not to write. It seemed as if his love for her could not have been very much after all, or he would have been pleased to comply with her request. She could not quite forgive him for

his neglect, glad as she was to know that he was safe.

The room was rather a large one; an old-fashioned room, with a low ceiling crossed by heavy beams; half parlour, half kitchen, with a wide open fireplace at one end, on which the logs had burnt to a dullish red just now, only brightening up with a faint flash of light now and then. The old chintz-covered arm-chair, in which Robert Ashley was wont to smoke his evening pipe, stood by the hearth ready for him.

Susan had been sitting with her face towards the open window, looking absently out at the garden, where daffodils and early primroses glimmered through the dusk. It was only the striking of the eight-day clock in the corner that roused her from her reverie. She stooped to pick up her work, which had fallen to the ground. She was standing folding this in a leisurely way, when she looked towards the fireplace, and gave a little start at seeing that her husband's arm-chair was no longer empty.

'Why, Robert,' she cried, 'how quietly you

must have come into the place! I never heard you.'

There was no answer, and her voice sounded strange to her in the empty room.

'Robert!' she repeated, a little louder; but the figure in the chair neither answered nor stirred.

Then a sudden fright seized her, and she knew that it was not her husband. The room was almost dark; it was quite impossible that she could see the face of that dark figure seated in the arm-chair, with the shoulders bent a little over the fire. Yet she knew, as well as ever she had known anything in her life, that it was not Robert Ashley.

She went slowly towards the fireplace, and stood within a few paces of that strange figure. A little flash of light shot up from the smouldering logs, and shone for an instant on the face.

It was John Granger!

Susan Ashley tried to speak to him; but the words would not come. And yet it was hardly so appalling a thing to see him there that she need have felt what she did. England is not so far from

America that a man may not cross the sea and drop in upon his friends unexpectedly.

The logs fell together with a crashing noise, and broke into a ruddy flame, lighting up the whole room. The chair was empty.

Susan uttered a loud cry, and almost at the same moment Robert Ashley came in at the door.

'Why, Susy!' he exclaimed, 'what's amiss, lass?'

She ran to him, and took shelter in his arms, sobbing hysterically, and then, calming herself with an effort, told him how she had seen John Granger's ghost.

Robert laughed her to scorn.

"Why, my pet, what fancies will you be having next? Granger is safe enough over in Yankee land. It was some shadow that took the shape of your old friend, to your fancy. It's easy enough to fancy such a thing when your mind's full of any one.'

'There's no use in saying that, Robert,' Susan answered, resolutely. 'It was no fancy. John Granger is dead, and I have seen his ghost.'

'He wasn't dead on the 10th of last December,

anyhow. They had a letter from him at Lawler's bank, dated that day. Simmons told me so.'

Susan shook her head mournfully.

'I've a feeling that he never got to America alive, Robert,' she said. 'I can't explain how it is, but I've a feeling that it was so.'

'Dead men don't write letters, Susy, or send for their money out of the bank.'

'Some one else might write the letters.'

'Nonsense, lass! they know John Granger's handwriting and signature well enough at the bank, depend upon it. It would be no easy matter to deceive them. But I'll look in upon Simmons to-morrow. He and I are uncommonly friendly, you know, and there's nothing he wouldn't do to oblige me, in a reasonable way. I'll ask him if there have been any more letters from Granger, and get him to give me the address.'

Susan did not say much more about that awful figure in the arm-chair. It was no use trying to convince her husband that the thing which she had seen was anything more than a creation of her own brain. She was very quiet all the rest of the

evening, though she tried her uttermost to appear as if nothing had happened.

Robert Ashley saw Mr. Simmons the cashier next day, and came back to his wife elated by the result of his inquiries. John Granger had written for another five hundred pounds by the very last post from America, and reported himself well and thriving. He was still in New York, and Mr. Simmons had given Robert Ashley his address in that city.

Susan wrote to her old friend that very afternoon, telling him what she had seen, and begging him to write and set her mind at ease. After all, it was very consoling to hear what she had heard from her husband, and she tried to convince herself that the thing she had seen was only a trick of her imagination.

Another month went by, and again in the twilight the same figure appeared to her. It was standing this time, with one arm leaning on the high mantelpiece; standing facing her as she came back to the room, after having quitted it for a few minutes for some slight household duty.

There was a better fire and more light in the room than there had been before. The logs were burning with a steady blaze that lit up the well-known figure and unforgotten face. John Granger was looking at her with an expression that seemed half reproachful, half beseeching. He was very pale, much paler than she had ever seen him in life; and as he looked, she standing just within the threshold of the door, she saw him lift his hand slowly and point to his forehead. The firelight showed her a dark red stain upon the left temple, like the mark of a contused wound.

She covered her face with her hands, shuddering and uttering a little cry of terror, and then dropped half fainting upon a chair. When she uncovered her face the room was empty, the firelight shining cheerily upon the walls, no trace of that ghostly visitant. Again when her husband came in she told him of what she had seen, and of that mark upon the temple which she had seen for the first time that night. He heard her very gravely. This repetition of the business made it serious. If it were, as Robert Ashley fully believed it was, a delusion of his wife's,

it was a dangerous delusion, and he knew not how to charm it away from her mind. She had conjured up a new fancy now, this notion of a blood-stained temple; the ghastly evidence of some foul play that had been done to John Granger.

And the man was alive and well in America all the time; but how convince a woman of that fact when she preferred to trust her own sick fancies?

This time Susan Ashley brooded over the thoughts of the thing she had seen, firmly believing that she had looked upon the shadow of the dead, and that there was some purpose to be fulfilled by that awful vision. In the day, however busy she might be with her daily work, the thought of this was almost always in her mind; in the dead silence of the night' when her husband was sleeping by her side, she would often lie awake for hours thinking of John Granger.

No answer had come to her letter, though there had been more than time for her to receive one.

'Robert,' she said to her husband one day, 'I do not believe that John Granger ever went to America.'

'Oh, Susy, Susy, I wish you could get John

Granger out of your head. Who is it that writes for his money, if it isn't he?'

'Anybody might know of the money—people know everything about their neighbours' affairs in Hillborough—and anybody that knew John Granger's hand might be able to forge a letter. I don't believe he ever went to America, Robert. I believe some accident—some fatal accident—happened to him on the night he was to leave Hillborough.'

'Why, Susy, what should happen to him, and we not hear of it?'

'He might have been waylaid and murdered. He had a good deal of money about him, I know, that night; he was to sail from London by the *Washington*, and his luggage was all sent to an inn near the Docks. I wish you'd write to the people, Robert, and ask if he arrived there at the time he was expected; and I wish you'd find out at the station whether any one saw him go away by the train that night.'

'It's easy enough to do as much as that to please you, Susy. But I wish you wouldn't dwell upon

these fancies about Granger; it's all nonsense, as you'll find out sooner or later.'

He wrote the letter which his wife wanted written, asking the landlord of the Victoria Hotel, London Docks, whether a certain Mr. John Granger, whose travelling chests had been forwarded from Hillborough, had arrived at his house on the 24th of July last, and when and how he had quitted it. He also took the trouble to go to the Hillborough Station, in order to question the station-master and his subordinates about John Granger's departure.

Neither the station-master nor the porters were able to give Robert Ashley any satisfactory information on this point. One or two of the men were not quite clear that they knew John Granger by sight; another knew him very well indeed, but could not swear to having seen him that night. The station-master was quite clear that he had *not* seen him.

'I'm generally pretty busy with the mail-bags at that time,' he said, 'and a passenger might very well escape my notice. But it would only have been civil in Granger to bid me good-bye; I've known him ever since he was a lad.'

This was not a satisfactory account to carry back to Susan; nor was the letter that came from London in a day or two much more satisfactory. The landlord of the Victoria Hotel begged to inform Mr. Ashley that the owner of the trunks from Hillborough had not arrived at his house until the middle of August. He was not quite sure about the date; but he knew the luggage had been lying in his place for something over three weeks, and he was thinking of advertising it, when the owner appeared.

Three weeks! and John Granger had left Susan Lorton that July night, intending to go straight to London. Where could he have been? What could he have been doing in the interval?

Robert Ashley tried to make light of the matter. Granger might have changed his mind at the last moment—at the railway station, perhaps—and might have gone off to visit friends in some other part of the country. But Susan told her husband that John Granger had no friends except at Hillborough, and that he was not given to changing his mind upon any occasion. She had now a settled conviction that some untimely fate had befallen her old friend, and that the letters from America were forgeries.

Ashley told his friend Simmons the story of the ghost rather reluctantly, but it was necessary to tell it in explaining how the letter to the London hotel-keeper came to be written. Of course Mr. Simmons was quite ready to agree with him that the ghostly part of the business was no more than a delusion of Susan's; but he was a good deal puzzled, not to say disturbed, by the hotel-keeper's letter. He had talked over John Granger's plans with him on that last day, and he remembered that John had been perfectly decided in his intention of going straight to London. The three weeks' interval between his departure from Hillborough and his arrival in that city was a mystery not easily to be explained.

Mr. Simmons referred to the letters from New York, and compared the signatures of them with previous signatures of John Granger's. If they were forgeries, they were very clever forgeries; but Granger's was a plain commercial hand by no means difficult to imitate. There was one thing noticeable in the signatures to the American letters—they were all exactly alike, line for line and curve for curve. This rather discomposed Mr. Simmons; for it is a noto-

rious fact that a man rarely signs his name twice in exactly the same manner. There is almost always some difference.

'I'm going up to London in a month,' said the cashier; 'I'll call at the Victoria Hotel when I'm there, and make a few inquiries about John Granger. We can make some excuse for keeping back the money in the mean time, if there should be any more written for.'

Before the month was out, John Granger's ghost appeared for the third time to Susan Ashley. She had been to Hillborough alone to make some little purchases in the way of linen-drapery, and came home through Hawley Wood in the tender May twilight. She was thinking of her old friend as she walked along the shadowy winding footpath. It was just such a still, peaceful evening as that upon which he had stood on the edge of the common looking back at her, and waving his hand, upon that last well-remembered night.

He was so much in her thoughts, and the conviction that he had come from among the dead to visit her was so rooted in her mind, that she was scarcely

surprised when she looked up presently, and saw a tall familiar figure moving slowly among the trees a little way before her. There seemed to be an awful stillness in the wood all at once, but there was nothing awful in that well-known figure.

She tried to overtake it; but it kept always in advance of her, and at a sudden turn in the path she lost it altogether. The trees grew thicker, and there was a solemn darkness at the spot where the path took this sharp turn, and on one side of the narrow footpath there was a steep declivity and a great hollow, made by a disused gravel-pit.

She went home quietly enough, with a subdued sadness upon her, and told her husband what had happened to her. Nor did she rest until there had been a search made in Hawley Wood for the body of John Granger.

They searched, and found him lying at the bottom of the gravel-pit, half-buried in loose sand and gravel, and quite hidden by a mass of furze and bramble that grew over the spot. There was an inquest, of course. The tailor who had made the clothes found upon the body identified them, and

swore to them as those he had made for John Granger. The pockets were all empty. There could be little doubt that John Granger had been waylaid and murdered for the sake of the money he carried upon him that night. His skull had been shattered by a blow from a jagged stick on the left temple. The stick was found lying at the bottom of the pit a little way from the body, with human hair and stains of blood upon it.

John Granger had never left Hillborough; and the person who had contrived to procure so much of his money, by sending the deposit receipts and forged letters from America, was, in all probability, his murderer. There was a large reward offered for the discovery of the guilty party; the police were hard at work; and the inquest was adjourned several times, in the hope that new facts might be elicited.

Susan Ashley and her father were examined closely as to the events of that fatal evening of July the 24th. Susan told everything: her cousin Stephen Price dropping in while they were at tea, the questions and answers about the money John

Granger carried upon him—to the most minute particular.

'Then Price knew of the money Granger had about him?' suggested the coroner.

'He did, sir.'

'And did he know that he had money on deposit in Hillborough Bank?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Did Price leave your father's house after Granger, or before him?'

'Before him, sir: nearly an hour before him.'

The inquest was adjourned; and, within a week of this examination, Matthew Lorton received an application from the police, asking for a photograph of his nephew Stephen Price, if he happened to possess such a thing.

He did possess one, and sent it to London by return of post.

The landlord of the Victoria Hotel identified this portrait as that of the person who represented himself to be John Granger, and who carried away John Granger's luggage.

After this the work was easy. Little links in

the chain were picked up one by one. A labouring man turned up who had seen Stephen Price sitting on a stile hard by Hawley Wood, hacking at a thick jagged-looking stake with his clasp-knife, on the night of the 24th of July. The woman at whose house Price lodged gave evidence that he broke an appointment to play billiards with a friend of his on that night; the friend had called at his lodgings for him twice, and had been angry about the breaking of the appointment; and Stephen Price came in about half-past ten o'clock, looking very white and strange. The lad who was his fellow-clerk was ready to swear to his having been disturbed and strange in his manner during the two or three weeks before he left Hillborough; but the boy had thought very little of this, he said, knowing how deeply Stephen was in debt.

The final examination resulted in a verdict of wilful murder; and a police-officer started for New York by the next steamer, carrying a warrant for the apprehension of Stephen Price.

He was not found very easily, but was ultimately apprehended, with some of John Granger's property still in his possession. He was brought home, tried,

found guilty, and hung, much to the satisfaction of Hillborough. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Vollair produced a will, which John Granger had executed a few days before his intended departure, bequeathing all he possessed to Susan Lorton—the interest for her sole use and benefit, the principal to revert to her eldest son after her death, the son to take the name of Granger. The bank had to make good the money drawn from them by Stephen Price. The boy came in due course, and was christened after the dead man, above whose remains a fair white monument has been erected in the rustic churchyard near Hawley Wood, at the expense of Robert and Susan Ashley; a handsomer tomb than is usually given to a man of John Granger's class, but it was the only thing Susan could do to show how much she had valued him who had loved her so dearly.

She often sits beside that quiet resting-place in the spring twilight, with her children busy making daisy-chains at her knee; but she has never seen John Granger's ghost since that evening in the wood, and she knows that she will never see it again.

PRINCE RAMJI ROWDEDOW.

I CANNOT say that Slimeford-on-the-Slushy is a likely town in which to make a great theatrical benefit. I cannot say that Slimeford is a good town for theatricals in any way or shape, or that the inhabitants of Slimeford patronize either the Thespian art, or any other art, or any science, amusement, or pursuit of any kind whatsoever, with much enthusiasm. I cannot say that Slimeford is a fine town or a pretty town; unless, indeed, your idea of architectural beauty is confined to one interminable street of undeviatingly ugly houses, intersected by an infinite number of smaller streets, if possible more ugly than the chief thoroughfare, and surrounded on all sides by a rising neighbourhood; a rising neighbourhood dotted with hideous manufactories, which start up, like grimy

demons, with outstretched wings of brick and mortar, to shut out the country. And, O reader, what on the surface of God's earth, as man has marred it, is more frightful than a rising neighbourhood? A row of newly-finished houses, a row of unfinished ditto, an exhausted brickfield, and a patch of waste land—ring the changes on these as you will, and get beauty out of them if you can; and only so much beauty can you get out of a rising neighbourhood.

I cannot say that the Slushy is a beautiful river, or that the muddy banks thereof are pleasant walking, or that any mortal, not an inhabitant of Slimeford, ever expressed admiration for its dirty waters, on which dismal black barges lie at anchor here and there, and into which various dye-works and other factories discharge their viscid and rainbow-hued liquids.

One peculiarity of Slimeford is that its working classes are always on strike at the very period when a dramatic company enters the town. You are greeted with the intelligence that the weavers are out, and not likely to be in for a couple of months; and that the dyers are resolved to have an additional

three halfpence an hour, or fold their arms and perish. You should have come last year; you would have done wonders last year. But unfortunately you are not in the habit of going to places last year.

Now I had the honour to be, for three seasons, first low comedian of the Theatre Royal, Slimeford; and for the first two seasons I had the honour to take benefits, whereat my labours to please were rewarded by a limited circle of from three to seven in the boxes, a dreary sprinkling in the pit, and a row-and-a-half or so in the gallery. Now, if you deduct £7 for the expenses of the house, as computed by the manager, thirty shillings for printing, an odd pound or so for properties—not a little money spent in the pursuit of that diplomatic process called benefit-making—you won't get much of a surplus out of £4 10s., two-thirds of which surplus, if there were one, would go to the lessee. Therefore my benefits, during the first two seasons, had the disappointing result of plunging me deeply and hopelessly into debt.

The third season was drawing to a close, and Slimeford was, if possible, in a state of greater stagnation than usual. The weavers had made a most

obstinate strike of it, and the only thing stirring was a penny subscription to keep the contumacious dyers from starvation. I looked around as I stood pensively on the banks of the Slushy, and meditated on my chances of filling the crazy old Theatre Royal on Wednesday, the 19th instant, which night had been set apart for the benefit of me, Mr. John Miffs. Now I had, in the course of my professional career, beheld one marvel in theatrical statistics—or shall I say playgoing human nature?—*i.e.* that however poor the inhabitants of a town, however high the price of the quartern loaf, however great the demand for blue ruin, with its attendant ills of starvation and crime; however you may have been assured again and again that the people cannot come to the theatre, because they have actually not the money to pay for admission, let Mr. Sims Reeves or Mr. Sothern, Mr. Charles Mathews, Mr. Irving, or Mr. Buckstone—let, I say, any of these aforesaid artists, or many others I could mention, put out an announcement, in capitals three feet high, of their intention to appear at the Theatre Royal Anywhere, and, lo! that theatre is immediately filled. Now, I don't know whether

it was an inspiration or not, but at the very moment when Venus rose pale in an opal evening sky, her beautiful face feebly mirrored in the grimy waters of the Slushy, I suddenly exclaimed, 'A star!' Yes, I would have a star to play for my benefit, and thus fill the theatre.

But then, what star? I had not the pleasure of Mr. Buckstone's acquaintance, and if I had, was it likely that distinguished comedian would withdraw himself from the part in which he was at that time delighting his friends in the Haymarket, for my pleasure and profit? I didn't know Mr. Sothern, but I knew enough of that gentleman to think it scarcely probable he would choose the Theatre Royal, Slimeford, wherein to commence his great tour of the provinces. I didn't know the talking fish; I hadn't so much as a pig-faced lady amongst my acquaintances. What star? Ah, Venus, shining with serene radiance above the smoke-cloud that envelopes Slimeford, could you only help me with a suggestion! If the Shah of Persia had been in England, he might have obliged me by taking a private box and exhibiting himself in state apparel to Slimeford.

And if the Shah of Persia, why not an Indian prince? Yes, above all things an Indian prince! A most brilliant idea! I registered a vow, as I stood on that bridge in the twilight. I would have an Indian prince to play for my benefit.

I am not of a lymphatic temperament. I believe, indeed, that I come rather under the head of the sanguine nervous, but I leave that question in physiology to the decision of the intelligent reader, when I inform him that the next morning every patch of paling, every blank wall, every house in Chancery, every stray shutter of every shop to let, was pasted with a staring red-and-blue announcement of the first and only appearance of His Royal Highness Prince Ramji Rowdedow, from the kingdom of Goojeebadanistan, that vast territory between the Ganges and the Himalayas, for the benefit of Mr. John Miffs; while in the principal windows of the town were exhibited lithographed full-length portraits of an imposing individual of the mulatto race, in a gorgeous costume of the character usually worn by that interesting Moor who is familiar to all students of the Shakespearian drama.

Depressed as was the aspect of trade in Slimeford, my notion took. There was from the first issuing of the bills considerable excitement in the town on the subject of the Indian prince. The very printer who set up the bills offered to do the job at a lower rate, on condition of being one of the favoured few who were to form a little deputation to meet the prince at the railway station. Of course there were many inquiries as to why the royal personage had left his native land; and his popularity rose tremendously, especially among the fairer portion of the community, when I explained that he had been deposed from the royal musnud by a benighted people, on account of the advancement and enlightenment of his opinions, especially with reference to polygamy and widow-burning. He was announced to appear in the character of Obi; and the fact of a native prince from the distant land of Bramah and Juggernaut coming down to Slimeford to enact that hero of romance, did not appear to the intelligent townsmen at all a strange occurrence. A foreign prince, a talking fish, or Mr. Charles Mathews—what are any such institutions intended for, but to

minister to the amusement, gratify the admiring gaze, and stimulate the organ of wonder of the inhabitants of Slimeford? For these good people, I think, had a very limited belief in the actual existence of any world beyond the rising neighbourhood which bounded their own town.

Wednesday the 19th instant arrived, and the whole theatre-going populace was on the *qui vive;* while the question as to how and when his highness from the principality of Goojeebadanistan would enter the town was freely discussed. Be it understood, these good people were quite assured that the prince was coming all the way from the shores of the Ganges for their amusement. Had they thought for a moment that his exiled highness might be a lodger in Marylebone, or a ratepayer of St. Pancras, the whole zest of the thing would have been gone.

Even at the theatre, amongst my companion votaries of Thespis, there was not a little curiosity; and I was compelled, with that beautiful candour which distinguishes me, to admit to one or two of my intimates that my friend Rowdedow was not in sober earnest actually the scion of a royal race, being in point of

fact the private secretary of a rich indigo planter, who had accompanied his employer to England, and who had been dismissed from that service on account of a suspected leaning towards the worship of the goddess Kali, the tutelary divinity of the Thugs, or stranglers, sometimes called Noosers. The damask cheek of my friend Percy Deloraine, *jeune premier*, blanched somewhat at this revelation; and he expressed a strong aversion from acting in the same piece with his highness; but on my assuring him that, if treated with a cold and distant respect, Ramji was the best fellow breathing, he consented to oblige me.

The prince, I informed my manager and brother actors, would not arrive until an hour or two before the commencement of the performance, as important business—no less, in fact, than an interview with the chief of the English Government concerning his restoration to that vast territory which extends from the western arm of the Ganges to the distant source of the Oxus, as I added, somewhat recklessly, with a view to local colouring—would detain him in London. I therefore read his part at rehearsal, arranged his entrances and exits, and went through all his stage

business. I also planned the construction and adornment of a temporary dressing-room, to be erected by the property-man for my royal friend's convenience, and made all arrangements necessary for the honourable reception of the royal personage. As I left the theatre, after that morning's rehearsal, a crowd of dirty little boys and one respectable maid-servant with a baby and a perambulator, did me the honour to accompany me in a little impromptu procession to my residence. Whether they imagined I might keep the prince in my pocket, or in a sealed bottle, like the genie in the *Arabian Nights*, I know not; but they evidently thought their best chance of beholding the Oriental potentate lay in not losing sight of me. Now, this persistent attention on the part of the public, honourable as it was to all concerned, was also somewhat embarrassing to me, as I had a good deal of work to accomplish (of a kind that must remain a secret to the British public) before His Royal Highness Ramji Rowdedow could possibly blaze, like the sun in his Oriental splendour, before the dazzled eyes of Slimeford. For this, I had need of a friend—a friend on whom I could rely—in

whose hand I could lay my own, and say, 'Here is the soul incapable of treachery; here is the tongue never known to betray;' or in the more vigorous language of Seven Dials, 'This 'ere's the cove wot never rounded on his pal.'

Such a friend I could boast in the person of Mr. Richard Wittington, eccentric comedian; and to him I went. What passed between us I do not intend to reveal, but our parting agreement was to the following effect: Wittington pledged himself to superintend the reception of his highness. For this purpose he was to hire the largest and most splendid open vehicle to be procured from the King's Arms livery-yard, and a pair of white horses; with which equipage he was to proceed, at a quarter-past five o'clock, to the railway station. He was also to hire an inferior vehicle, in which a portion of the band belonging to the theatre—namely, clarionet, cornet, and big drum—should be seated, to give effect to the procession with such soul-stirring melodies as 'See, the conquering Hero,' 'Rule, Britannia,' the March from 'Bluebeard,' &c. This my friend Wittington was to do unaided, while

I departed to a distant village, some ten miles up the line, to arrange a small matter of business which it was impossible for me to postpone.

The hour came, the procession started in the following order from the King's Arms :—fly-and-pair, yellow body, pink-striped chintz lining, chocolate wheels, Mr. Richard Wittington seated *solus* in the vehicle, looking, strange to say, rather depressed than elated at the prospect of receiving his serene highness ; nextly, the second-best fly, green body, red wheels, and leopard-skin chintz lining, a showy, impressive equipage, in which were seated the clarionet, cornet, flute, and big drum attached to the theatre, the big drum nearly filling the interior of the vehicle, and somewhat obscuring the distinguished musicians seated therein. This imposing procession of two carriages was followed by an immense crowd, composed of half the population of Slimeford. Of course the worthy citizens, being out of work, had nothing better to do than to pay their respects to the royal foreigner, and to show him, in the deliberate and piercing stare of the well-bred Englishman, the distinguishing mark of British hospitality.

Arrived at the station, which, with that regard to public convenience which generally characterizes the station of a provincial town, was about a mile from the high street, Mr. Wittington alone descended from his vehicle, and entered the gates of the building. He expressed a request to his friends and the public that they would not accompany him any farther, as their appearance in too abrupt a manner might disconcert the modest disposition of the great Ramji. This mild request, however, did not prevent Mr. Bulkins of the King's Arms, renowned for possessing great sporting acumen, and being always able to name the outsider that will not win the Derby or the Leger; Mrs. Potash the washerwoman; her daughter, Miss Potash (in her best bonnet of scarlet velvet and pearl beads, a cheerful and summery headgear); Miss Hooxanise, the dressmaker's apprentice; three nursemaids, sixteen babies, and several other enterprizing individuals, from penetrating to the very door of the second-class carriage, from which, with the unaffected humility that distinguishes those who are born in the purple, descended the illustrious Rowdedow.

Now, most of the inhabitants of Slimeford were well acquainted with the private life and domestic afflictions of Othello the noble Moor; and it occurred to all present that the prince bore a very strong resemblance to that individual as he would appear after exchanging his costly robes for a badly-fitting dress-coat from the emporium of Messrs. Moses and Sons. The noble physiognomy of the prince, it is marvellous to add, recalled to several among the playgoing population of Slimeford a face they had seen somewhere before, though the recollection was so vague as to make very little impression on those not over impressionable citizens. His complexion of a brownish black, was relieved by a crimson glow which illumined his cheeks and threw out the whites of his eyes with Oriental brilliancy. His long sleek hair, of rather a bluish black (in the sun it looked a thought rusty), was worn with the ends rolled under, after the manner of gentlemen of the equestrian profession. He wore a large beard and moustache, which imparted something of ferocity to his otherwise mild (sooth to say, somewhat timorous) expression of countenance. He wore a

magnificent fez cap, surmounted by a rich (though rather tarnished) gold tassel, and decorated with two or three large brooches (somewhat in the style of those which issue from the hands of the theatrical ornament-makers of Birmingham and Bow street), but which, no doubt, were the royal jewels of his imperial race; he also displayed on the ample breast of his dress-coat, which was a little white about the seams, various stars and crosses, besides that noble quadruped, the elephant, usually worn by his youthful highness, Hamlet the Dane. A superb crescent of Bristol paste, mounted on red cloth, shimmered in the dim obscurity of his waistcoat, and, seen from a distance, impressed the young mind with the idea of the diamonds of Golconda. His costume was completed by a pair of white duck trousers, patent-leather alberts, a bamboo cane, and an eye-glass, it being only becoming in royalty to be shortsighted. Nothing could exceed the *empressement* with which Mr. Wittington greeted the prince; he conversed with him apart in a foreign language, with characteristic gesticulation which was eminently gratifying to the lookers on; he preceded him

to the carriage, hat in hand, walking backwards, yes, actually walking backwards; a feat by which he cruelly punished the corns of the aggrieved populace who pressed close behind him. He also handed the exiled potentate into the pink-striped fly, and seated himself respectfully opposite, with his back to the horses. Then arose such a shout as, perhaps, since the days when the Reform Bill was passed, had never been heard in Slimeford: a shout of friendly welcome for the dark scion of a princely race, who sat bowing, smiling, and displaying a set of faultlessly white teeth to the admiring citizens. The band began, at a wink from my friend Wittington, to play 'See, the conquering Hero,' &c., which, as within no one's knowledge had the royal person ever been in battle, was of course highly appropriate. The two flies set off at a foot pace, the delighted populace on either side. They were charmed with the prince's bow; they were enraptured with the prince's smile; and 'Oh, look at his teeth!' yes, an audible murmur was heard amongst the throng, 'Look at his teeth!' At which, strange to say, the prince abruptly closed his mouth, and declined to exhibit his dental appen-

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dages any more. The prince was evidently of a sensitive and retiring disposition. But, above all things, that which delighted the populace was the evident and demonstrative admiration evinced by his serene highness for the town and public buildings of Slimeford. He expressed, in vehement pantomime, his opinion that Slimeford in architectural beauty surpassed the proud towers of Delhi, the city of palaces; that the river Slushy in natural beauty might dispute the palm with his native Ganges, or the classic Indus dear to his childhood. When Mr. Wittington pointed out to him the church of St. Bulgrumblery, the chapel-of-ease, the fish market, the Baptist chapel, the post-office, and that æsthetic range of buildings known as the shambles, devoted to the sale of butcher's meat, the prince's shrugs, nods, and gesticulations evinced such admiration as the inhabitants of the town had never beheld before, even in a new candidate for the representation of the borough. The procession was, in short, intensely successful; and my new star, the illustrious Ramji, was honoured with such an ovation as I think neither Spanish dancers, talking fish, nor Mr.

Charles Mathews would ever have received in Slimeford.

But in spite of the cheers, of the heartiness of that welcome which the true-born Englishman always extends to every foreigner, there was something in the prince's manner, a shiver in the prince's manly form, a chatter about the prince's teeth, and, at the same time, a paleness of complexion, verging on the ghastly, visible in my friend Mr. Wittington, difficult to account for.

Can you, O sagacious reader, solve me this little enigma? Of course you can. I thought so. You know that it was because the great Ramji Rowdedow, illustrious heir to the principality of Goojeebadanistan, that vast territory between the Ganges and the Himalayas, was neither more nor less distinguished an individual than John Miffs, comedian—I, John Miffs, with the adornment of a burnt cork, a pennyworth of Armenian bole, a halfpennyworth of vermilion, a great deal of *crêpe* hair, and an Othello wig,—I, John Miffs, who had gone that morning ten miles down the line, and, at the house of a friendly innkeeper in the village of Bigglethorpe, had arrayed

myself in the costly attire of the Indian potentate. I leave it to the imagination, then, of the amiable reader whether I was not a little alarmed lest that intelligent public, which loves to be gulled, but hates to find out that it has been gulled, should by any means discover the cheat that I was putting upon it. Thus when, during my triumphal progress from the station to the theatre, the populace admired my teeth —I have a fine set of teeth, I confess—I shut my mouth, in mortal fear lest young Joe Mulkins, Mr. Forcep the dentist's assistant, who was hanging on to the door of my chariot, should see that double tooth near the front which he had stopped three days before, and which still glittered in all the first radiance of the gold filling, Who can describe the horror of that moment, when a gentle and refreshing shower descended from the afternoon sky, and I dreaded to behold my complexion trickling down in brown drops upon my shirt-front, and when my friend Dick's nervous attempts to shut up that mysterious vehicle, the fly, were greeted with the anger of a ferocious crowd?

'Oh, hang it! let us see un; we've come all the

way to see un; don't go for to shoot up t' coach!' cried that unappeasable populace.

But the heavens were kind to the descendant of a royal race, and I shone out again in that beauty whose only blemish was its liability to come off.

'Put out your hand,' whispered Wittington; 'it looks very natural.'

I placed that member, adorned with a property diamond ring, carelessly on the carriage door, and lo! the admiring crowd exclaimed as with one voice, 'Look at his 'and!' Indeed, one old man, a determined sightseer, who had never quitted the wheels of our vehicle, laid hold with reverence upon my dexter paw, perhaps to discover whether that portion of an Indian prince's anatomy was like the flesh and blood of every-day life.

The royal *cortège* reached the doors of the theatre, still followed by the delighted crowd. The prince alighted from the stately vehicle, and then gracefully ascended, on the tips of his patent leather alberts, the green baize-covered plank which the property man, enthusiastic in the cause of exiled greatness, had placed to form an impromptu bridge leading

from the kerbstone to the stage-door, so that his highness's gracious feet should not be defiled by the puddles of Slimeford. At the stage door the Oriental countenance of his serenity broke anew into a radiant smile, and he made a series of grateful bows to the crowd; which were responded to by three hearty cheers and ever so many little ones in. These culminated in a deafening shout as he disappeared within the building; while Mr. Richard Wittington closed the door firmly on the persevering populace, which immediately proceeded to the pit and gallery doors, there to await, armed with sterling coin of the realm, the commencement of the performance, and the first appearance on the boards of Slimeford of a prince of the blood royal.

Within the theatre, Rowdedow was greeted with bows and smiles from the ladies and gentlemen of the company, who had dressed early for their respective parts in the drama of "Obi," and assembled in the green-room for the sole purpose of staring at him. There was a little attempt at conversation. The prince was asked his opinion of England, English manners and customs, &c., but the shrugs of his

graceful shoulders, and elevations of his strongly defined eyebrows, with which he responded, evinced such an utter ignorance of the English language as rendered discourse impossible; indeed, when Mr. Spavins, a gentleman who had been in India, actually addressed his royal highness in Hindostanee, he still continued the shrug of non-comprehension, whereat that gentleman was cruelly laughed at by his compeers for having attempted a language he could not speak. 'That's *your* Hindostanee, is it? You see, his excellency doesn't understand a syllable.' As indeed his excellency did not.

The property man preceded Ramji with two composite candles to the before-mentioned temporary dressing-room, and a young man who ran errands for the company requested to know, both by talking at the highest pitch of his voice (strange that foreigners do not understand our language better when we shout it as through a ship's trumpet!) and by expressive pantomine, whether he could be of any assistance in the toilet of the star. His aid was declined; and the illustrious Ramji begged, still in pantomime, to be left alone.

About this time the manager asked with considerable surprise what had become of Miffs ? and the cry of 'Where's Miffs?' was echoed through the theatre. My friend Dick Wittington explained that as I did not play in my first piece, I had taken the opportunity of running down to some friends to sell some tickets; 'or very likely,' continued my friend, 'he may be next door' (next door was a tavern much affected by the Thespian corps). Richard indeed ran into the bar and asked if anybody had seen Miffs. No, nobody had seen Miffs. Miffs was not to be found. He did not even make his appearance when, the last bar of the overture being played, the curtain rose to a delighted audience, and in due course the Royal Obi appeared upon the boards. The prince enacted the part entirely in pantomime, applauded to the echo, and great was the wonderment of Slimeford that a denizen of a distant land, the wanderer from another hemisphere, should be so well up in every little bit of Victoria business and claptrap, familiar to them from the performance of the great Hicks. The curtain fell, the theatre rang with loud cries of 'Rowdedow!' the prince appeared, his hand upon his breast, his head bent, his jaws

working vigorously, as if employed in chewing betel-nut, or repeating to himself inward pæans of thanks-giving. This done, he made a general bow to the company, and in spite of numerous requests that he would take wine, brandy, ale, that he would stay to supper, that he would meet a party at the 'Shakespeare' (aforesaid tavern next door), that he would stop and play for the manager's benefit, and so on, and so forth—he insisted on departing immediately, in company with my friend Mr. Wittington. So unassuming was his disposition, so reserved his nature, that he contrived to elude the crowd waiting at the stage door to behold him emerge. So secret were his movements in the subtlety of his oriental nature, that it was never known how he got to the railway station. Nay, the clerks and porters swore to the fact that no Indian whatsoever, or indeed any individual of a coloured race, left the station either that night or subsequently; and it was never known to any one in Slimeford how this royal and interesting amateur reached India, or the Ganges, or the Himalayas, or whatever his destination might be; whether his interview with the Secretary of State for India

was successful; whether he ever regained the throne of his forefathers, or any fact whatsoever connected with the illustrious Ramji Rowdedow.

A quarter of an hour after his departure, however, I, Mr. John Miffs, made my appearance, ready to play in the last piece, with a black rim round my left eye which my kind friends insinuated I had got in a fight on the previous evening. I can only say, in conclusion, that this was the best benefit I ever had in Slimeford, realizing the handsome sum of twenty-seven pounds fourteen shillings and fourpence; but that, taking into account the risk I ran of being torn piecemeal by infuriated weavers and dyers had my disguise been penetrated, the money was dearly earned.

TOO BRIGHT TO LAST.

LUCY DERWENT played the walking-ladies, with a share of the juvenile business, at the Theatres Royal, Slowmington, Comberly, and Drifford, on which circuit it was my humble lot to be engaged for the second old women and general utility. It must not be supposed that I really was old, or even elderly. I played old women because my personal appearance was unattractive, my stage wardrobe somewhat scanty, and my aspirations of the humblest. I came of a theatrical family: my father had been a clown, and had lost his life in consequence of an accident during the run of *Harlequin Gulliver and the Fairy Queen of Lilliput*, a very splendid pantomime, at one of the East-end London theatres, in which Mr. Maltraver's celebrated troup of infant

prodigies appeared. The infant prodigies have grown up now, and are great hulking men and women, hanging on to the theatrical profession in very subordinate positions, as I, who was an infant prodigy myself, can testify.

My father died in the heyday of his professional career, leaving my poor mother with three helpless children, of whom I was the eldest. She had been a principal dancer at one of the small theatres when my father married her, and a very pretty woman; but the coming of the children put an end to her dancing, and her beauty faded very quickly with the cares of her married life. I am compelled to admit that my father was not the best husband in the world, though he was the easiest and most good-natured of men, and loved us all dearly. But he was just as easy and good-natured with his boon companions as he was with his wife and children, and was always getting into bad company somehow, and coming home in the early dawn—oh, so tipsy and so helpless, with such a white soddened face and such limp arms and legs.

My mother went back to the stage when she was

left a widow ; but, her beauty being quite worn away, she was at a disadvantage with the managers, and was obliged to fall into a very humble position. She danced a little, and sang a little, and played small parts ; sometimes representing a lovely young heiress of seventeen, with her poor faded face and thin wasted figure and shabby dress, sometimes an old woman with wrinkles and a red nose. They used to send her on for anything, poor dear, knowing that it was a stern necessity for her to be employed, and to get bread for her three little ones.

She wore herself out at last, and when I was about sixteen I lost her. Heaven knows how bitter that loss was to me, and how all the sunshine and youth seemed to vanish out of my life when she was gone. I was an old woman from that moment, and any little talent which I may have had for the stage—and I had been rather successful in childish characters, and had received a good deal of praise in my time—departed with my happiness and hope. I had hoped for a time in which I might succeed as a leading actress, and earn a salary that would keep my mother in comfort. I had fancied the life we should

lead, and the bright happy home we might have; but this hope was gone now—I had nothing left but duty. I had my younger sister to work for—the boy had been taken in hand by a brother of my poor mother's, a small tradesman at Brompton, and was doing well; so I had only Amelia Jane to think of. She was a good girl, and used to travel everywhere with me, and to act occasionally; but I was very careful that she should not waste her time hanging about the theatre when she wasn't wanted, and I contrived to find a respectable day school for her in each of the three towns on Mr. Ponsonby's circuit.

Perhaps I am saying too much about myself, as the story I am going to tell has nothing to do with me or my affairs. I was a very humble individual in Mr. Ponsonby's company. Whatever beauty I had ever had—and up to my fifteenth birthday I had promised to be like my mother in her best days—had all left me after a severe attack of small-pox, which nearly cost me my life as well, and put an end to all my hopes of ever doing much as an actress. I was only two-and-twenty, but I had a grave, old-fashioned way that suited the old women, people said; and I

took to that line willingly enough, being glad to earn a living anyhow for Amelia Jane and myself.

I used to redden my nose night after night, until I scarcely knew what it was to appear with that feature of its natural colour; though I really don't know why it is that dramatic old age should always be distinguished by that particular infirmity; but if at any time I did venture to omit the reddening process, I was sure to be told that I had no real love for my profession, and no appreciation of character.

'Character, my dear, is what you've got to think about, if ever you want to advance a step beyond your present position,' the stage manager said to me; 'and there's nothing like a touch of vermilion at the end of the nose to give character.'

I had been jogging on in my quiet way for some years, and had got to be looked upon as a very useful person in the company. Amelia Jane was grown up by this time, and was rather a pretty girl, with a sweet soprano voice and a good deal of dramatic talent. She played all the chambermaids, and her salary was much larger than mine—not that she was

ever proud or stuck up about that; for she was the dearest, simplest little creature in the world, and fancied there was no one like her sister Martha. She had been on the stage three years—in Mr. Ponsonby's company all the time,—and I had passed my twenty-seventh birthday, and was beginning to fancy myself quite an old maid, when Lucy Derwent came to us.

I think she was the loveliest girl I ever saw in my life. I don't mean to say that I have not seen women with more perfect features, but Lucy's face had a brightness of colouring and expression that bewitched one at the first glance. I never knew any one fail to admire her. It was such a girlish, lovable beauty. Eyes that were really blue—the bright pure blue of a cloudless summer sky,—and with an innocent confiding look in them that was even lovelier than their colour; the sweetest mouth that ever smiled—and this one was always smiling; a little dimpled chin; and a complexion that was all lilies and roses, and upon which the stage paint seemed pollution. She was tall and very slim, with none of those points which are supposed to constitute a fine figure, but with a youthful grace which to my mind

more than made up for any deficiencies of that kind. Altogether she was a most charming creature, and when Mr. Ponsonby engaged her he told us he had secured a treasure. She was quite a young lady, we found. She had been educated at a boarding school, played the piano, and spoke French, Italian, and German with more or less proficiency. Her father was a barrister, a dissipated, extravagant man, who had a large family, and was always in embarrassed circumstances. So his children had been compelled to look about them and think of getting a living for themselves, and Lucy had determined to become an actress, having a passion for the stage.

Of course I did not learn these things all at once ; they came out little by little, as Lucy and I got to be intimate. She took to me wonderfully from the first, as I had taken to her, and used to ask my advice about her dresses, and so on, and seemed to think a great deal of my experience. She had only been on the stage twelve months when she came to Mr. Ponsonby, and had made wonderful progress in that short time. I do not say that she was a genius ; but she was very clever, and had a graceful,

easy way in everything she did, which won upon her audience, and made her a favourite at once. Our leading lady, Miss Juliet Vavasour, otherwise Mrs. Mole, who was rather a ponderous person of eight-and-thirty, with a husband in the orchestra, and a family of children at home, was not too well pleased with Miss Derwent, and was very angry and jealous when Mr. Ponsonby cast her any important part.

There never was a more light-hearted, joyous creature than Lucy when she came to us at Slowmington. The household at home was carried on in a scrambling, easy-going kind of manner, as I gathered from her talk. There were ever so many brothers and sisters, all very fond of one another, and still fonder of the mother, who was the centre of all things for them; and they contrived to take life very pleasantly somehow or other, in spite of all shortcomings on the part of the master of the house.

Lucy was full of wit and fun, dear girl, and her coming amongst us seemed quite to brighten our lives, as Amelia Jane and I used to tell her often. She lodged in the house we had always lodged in at Slowmington—a queer old-fashioned place in a

shady court at the obscure end of the town,—and little by little she got to live with us altogether, sharing our meals and dividing our expenses, declaring that I was a wonder of management and economy, and that I saved her a great deal of money by my careful ways. She was always well dressed, both on and off the stage; for she had a whole tribe of rich and fashionable cousins, who sent her great boxes of clothes in excellent condition, and she was not at all ashamed to tell us the source from which her handsome wardrobe had been derived.

'If it rested with papa to supply me, I suppose I should have to wear the same gown from year's end to year's end, for it never dawns upon him that his daughters can want gowns,' she said, laughing; 'but luckily for me, my cousins are rich and generous, and I get the reversion of all their ball and dinner dresses—much to the aggravation of their maids, I dare say.'

She was such a bright winning creature, that the simplest dress took a grace from her beauty. I was never tired of admiring her, and all her gay fascinating ways. She was very much admired by the

gentlemen of the company too, who used to gather round her in the green-room, and make quite a little court of worshippers; but she received all their compliments with a kind of gracious indifference, and seemed in no danger of losing her heart to any one of them. We used to tease her a little about these admirers; on which she would always tell us that she had never been in love, and never should be in love as long as she lived.

'What, Lucy!' cried my sister; 'do you mean to say that you are going to be an old maid?'

'I don't know about that, Amelia; one may marry without being in love, you know. If any one were to offer me a handsome house, and a carriage and pair, and plenty of servants, and all that kind of thing, I think I should be very much inclined to accept his proposal.'

'Why, Lucy, is it possible that you could be mercenary?'

'Would that be mercenary?' she asked, laughing. 'Well, I don't know; if the gentleman was not very nice, and if the carriage was a landau, I might refuse him; but if it was a barouche, and

he had dark eyes, I think I should say yes. But even then he must have a brougham as well, or how could I go to parties?'

'And what is to become of poor Mr. Ponsonby?' I said. 'I'm afraid there is no hope for him.'

Our manager was a single man, not quite forty years of age, and had proved rather fickle and capricious in his relations with the fair sex up to this time. But he had shown himself desperately smitten by Lucy Derwent, and we all of us knew that she might be Mrs. Ponsonby whenever she pleased. He was a very good fellow; not handsome by any means, but with a frank, pleasing countenance, and he was a great favourite on the Slowmington circuit, both in his private and public capacity. He was the soul of honour in all his dealings, and very kind and liberal to his company. Amelia Jane and I thought that Lucy Derwent might do worse than marry George Ponsonby. He was a clever light comedian, had acted in London for two or three seasons with considerable *éclat*, and was reputed to have saved money.

'What!' Lucy cried, with a little scream of horror, marry that old man?'

'My dear child, he is not forty.'

'If he isn't, he's awfully close to it—quite double my age, at any rate, and no barouche. Why, Patty, I might as well marry my grandpapa.'

'But if he is devotedly attached to you, as I am sure he is, and would make you a very good husband—'

'I don't want a good husband, you tiresome Patty; I want a barouche, and it must have Cee springs, and he must have dark eyes. Mr. Ponsonby's are green, or at least they were green when he was young and there was some colour in them; they are quite washed out now—a pale drab, like whity-brown paper—and his hair is exactly the same shade. And oh, if I were his wife, how tired I should be of seeing him play Charles Surface, and all manner of French marquises in a light-blue cotton velvet court suit, trimmed with tarnished silver lace! Perhaps he would want me to sit in the box office and take the money, or to stand at the wing and prompt him when he didn't know his part.'

'I'm sure he would make you the star of his theatre,' I said, 'and that you might have a very happy life.'

I had been brought up so entirely among theatrical people, that I thought to marry a prosperous provincial manager was almost the highest fate a young woman could aspire to; but Lucy Derwent only laughed at me when I told her so, and it seemed as if there was very little hope for Mr. Ponsonby.

There seemed less hope for him by and by when Mr. Roderick Macdonald came to Slowmington for a fortnight's starring engagement.

It was summer-time when this gentleman came to us, the beginning of June, and the country round about was all abloom with wild flowers. I don't think I can remember finer weather than we had just then, in all my life; not that it was by any means favourable weather for a country theatre; but oh, what delicious days, what cloudless blue skies, what a freshness and glory in the mornings, what a tender and pensive beauty in the dewy twilight, when the stars came out one by one in the opal-tinted heaven, and there was a rosy flush over all the west till nine o'clock at night!

Slowmington is a fashionable town, a great

hunting-place in winter, and a kind of inland watering-place in summer. There is a mineral spa, but I don't think many people drink the waters; and there are botanical gardens, where there are *fêtes* and archery meetings; yet at its best the town is quiet, and the visitors have rather a faded elderly look. All the country round is exquisite, and there are more walks and drives than one can easily reckon; and about the town itself, and the villas sprinkled on the green-wooded slope on the western side of the town, there is an all-pervading air of prettiness and elegance not often seen. Rich merchants and manufacturers from the great city of Hammerford have their country houses here, and the place has the drowsy, reposeful air of a town that has never had to work for its own living.

Mr. Roderick Macdonald had been starring all through England before he came to try his fortunes at Slowmington, and had met with varying success in the course of his wanderings. He was the spend-thrift heir of a good old Scottish family, an ex-captain of dragoons, who had run through a handsome fortune, and had taken to the stage as a last

resource. Wherever he went he excited considerable curiosity and interest, on account of his antecedents; and he was looked upon generally as a distinguished amateur, who acted from pure love of dramatic art. No doubt Mr. Macdonald was very fond of acting; but it must be confessed that he wanted money very badly, and looked to his dramatic genius as a source of income.

We were very curious about him at Slowmington, having heard all manner of stories about his desperate goings-on during his military career, and of his habit of knocking down any gentleman of the dramatic profession with whose opinions he happened to disagree. He had been summoned before the magistrates in several towns to answer for this little weakness of his. Having heard this of him, we expected to find him a disagreeable and supercilious kind of person, and were prepared to hold our own against him, and to demonstrate our indifference to his superior rank by every means in our power.

He played light comedy, eccentric comedy, and the broadest low comedy, having chosen his *répertoire* from a very wide field, and without reference to any

particular line of business. He had been knocking about in the theatrical profession for something less than three years, when he came to Slowmington, and had acted for a season in London, but with no marked success.

How well I remember the Saturday afternoon on which I first saw him! The company had waited for him till quite late in the afternoon, in order to rehearse one of the pieces for Monday. We had almost given him up, and were talking of going home to tea, the actors grumbling about him angrily, and saying that it was like his impudence to keep us all waiting in this manner.

The green-room at Slowmington opened into a little bit of garden, where there were a few gooseberry bushes and a sycamore tree. It was such a garden as one would have thought nothing of in any other situation; but it was quite a valuable addition to the small stuffy green-room, and in fine weather we used to sit out here when we were not wanted on the stage for rehearsal; and at night the actors used to smoke their pipes here, between whiles, during the performance.

Lucy and I were sitting on a little bench under the sycamore, when the star made his appearance at last, coming down a narrow passage leading from the stage-door, with the manager by his side. He was a very tall man, tall beyond the common height of men, and had a bright fair face, with blue eyes, and dark-brown hair curling crisply round a high, broad forehead; it was rather a Byronic head, I thought. Our manager introduced Mr. Macdonald to us. He acknowledged the introduction graciously enough, but glanced at us all very carelessly, I fancied, until he came to Lucy Derwent, when his eyes brightened all at once with a surprised admiring look, as if he had never seen anything prettier than the picture before him. And indeed it might have been so, for Lucy was looking her loveliest that afternoon, as she sat under the sycamore with her hat lying on her lap, and her sunny hair falling loosely about her face, while the shadows of the leaves flickered upon her light muslin dress.

She was to act a good deal with the stranger, and Mr. Ponsonby made this particular introduction with more *empressement* than he had shown in making the

others. He wanted to insure courteous treatment for his favourite. Perhaps when a few nights had gone by, and those two had acted together in a good many pieces, Mr. Ponsonby may have been inclined to think there was a little too much courtesy in Roderick Macdonald's manner to Miss Derwent.

The engagement did not prove a very successful one. People came for the first night or two out of curiosity, I think, anxious to see the tall ex-dragoon'; but after those first nights the audiences dropped off, and the house was thinly occupied. The Botanical Gardens and the rural walks and drives round Slowmington were more attractive on these lovely June evenings than the prettiest theatre in England.

Mr. Macdonald bore this neglect with supreme good-humour. He had not knocked any one down yet, and had conducted himself altogether in a very agreeable manner. I do not know whether he was really a good actor; but I know that he made us laugh a great deal on the stage—much more than his audience ever laughed at him, but then provincial audiences are apt to be stolid. He was full of fun and nonsense; mixed up the most ridiculous sayings

of his own with the language of the author, in the wildest way, made all sorts of absurd remarks about the audience *sotto voce*, and contrived to keep Lucy in a perpetual titter all the time she was on the stage with him.

He was pleased by her laughing so readily at his jokes, he was pleased with her beauty, pleased with her gay winning manners. So long as he was acting with her he seemed not to care how empty the house was, or how cold the audience. I don't think he knew that it was empty at such times; I think the boxes were peopled and radiant for him when those two were on the stage together—he her ardent lover, she all smiles and blushes and tenderness, so natural in her girlish confusion and sweet maiden shyness, that it was difficult to believe there was any acting in the business. I told her as much one night; but she laughed, and said I was the most nonsensical creature in the world. Behind the scenes at night, and in the little garden under the sycamore every morning at rehearsal, those two used always to be together. Mr. Macdonald had been a great deal abroad, and talked French and German perfectly, I

am told. He used to converse in those languages with Lucy, and was charmed with her own imperfect schoolgirl talk, for which she was accustomed to make many blushing apologies. It is not to be supposed that such a flirtation as this could escape notice in a theatre, where people are all eyes and ears. That confidential talk in foreign tongues seemed exceedingly offensive to some members of our company. Miss Juliet Vavasour was especially indignant with what she was pleased to call Miss Derwent's carryings-on. If people were not ashamed of what they had to say, they would speak English, this lady said; and she wondered what result Miss Derwent could expect from such a flirtation with a man like Mr. Macdonald, who, of course, could have no serious or honourable intentions, and was only amusing himself at her expense. I defended my dear girl indignantly when Miss Vavasour said these bitter things; but she went on saying them all the same, and was as angry and jealous as if she had been young and single, and had wished to win Mr. Macdonald for herself. I must own, however, that the flirtation did seem rather a desperate one, and I

took occasion to lecture Lucy very gravely about her conduct, and to tell her the hard things that her enemies were beginning to say about her. When I had finished my remonstrance, she threw her arms round my neck, and hid her blushing face upon my shoulder.

'Oh, Patty,' she said, 'I love him so dearly. It is not a flirtation; it is the most serious thing in the world—it is for life or death.'

'Oh, my dear, my dear!' I cried, grieved beyond expression to discover the desperate state of the case. 'Have you considered what a wild, dissipated man Mr. Macdonald is, what a bad reputation he has?'

'I have considered nothing, Patty, except that he is the only man upon earth for me, and that I love him with all my heart. But he is not dissipated. He has been a little wild perhaps, and extravagant in the past—he says as much himself. And what of that? All generous young men are wild and extravagant.'

'What has he said to you, Lucy? Has he asked you to be his wife?'

'Oh, no, Patty. Things have not gone quite so

far as that. But I know that he loves me; he has told me so in a hundred ways. I think you can see as much as that with your own eyes, you ridiculously serious old Patty.'

'Yes, my dear; I have seen as much as that from the first night you two acted together, I think. But I don't like the business for all that, Lucy, and I am sorry you should get yourself talked about on account of a man of whom you know so little. If you were to marry Mr. Macdonald, I don't think it would be a good match, or that you would ever ride in the barouche you talk of.'

'I resign the barouche for ever,' she answered, laughing. 'I would go on drudging and toiling all my life as an obscure country actress for his sake. Yes, and redden my nose even, and play old women. What is there in this world I would not do for his sake? Oh, Patty, you don't know how noble he is, and what a charm there is in his voice and manner when he talks to me.'

'I know that he has turned your head, Lucy,' I said, 'and that's about the only sure thing I do know of him.'

It was nearly the end of the fortnight by this time, and still those two were always together. Mr. Macdonald used to escort Lucy home from rehearsal, and then he would come into our homely old-fashioned parlour, and sit there talking to us for an hour at a time, and making himself so agreeable that I could not bring myself to be uncivil to him, however doubtful and anxious I might feel; and I was very anxious, for I saw what a hold he had upon my poor girl's heart, and dreaded the issue of this affair. At night, in the soft summer moonlight—the moon was at the full at the end of that fortnight, I remember—we used to find him waiting for us at the stage-door; and he used to walk by Lucy's side, through the tranquil empty streets, while my sister and I went on a little before them. Lucy's beauty seemed to take a new radiance from her happiness just then. I fancied she grew lovelier every day, and I could not wonder that Roderick Macdonald loved her.

There was one person in the theatre who watched Lucy and her lover with a very grave and anxious countenance, and that person was Mr. Ponsonby, the

manager. He grew quite absent-minded and careless in his acting, and had a preoccupied look at all times. I was very sorry for him; for I knew what a good fellow he was, and how truly he loved Lucy Derwent. If he had not Mr. Macdonald's brilliant manners and Byronic head, he had other qualities which seemed to me more valuable—steadiness and truth and honesty, a good temper, and a kind heart. How little we knew about the aristocratic Scotchman, except that he spoke French and German exquisitely, and had an intellectual forehead and bright blue eyes!

It came to the last day of his engagement, and I thought Mr. Macdonald looked very gloomy as the time of his departure drew near. He was to begin a week's engagement at Hammerford on Monday, and was to travel there on Sunday morning, after acting with us on Saturday evening. Lucy and I walked to the theatre together on Saturday morning, and I ventured to ask her if Mr. Macdonald had said anything serious. There had been ample time and opportunity for him to do so, had he been so minded. I think the question pained her a little, and the look

of distress in the sweet young face made me feel myself a monster of cruelty.

'No, Patty,' she answered, after a pause, 'he has said nothing yet. I think there are obstacles to his marrying yet awhile; the embarrassed state of his circumstances, perhaps. You know men are not so courageous as women in these things. They cannot face poverty as fearlessly as we can for the sake of any one we love. He speaks of himself in a very gloomy way, but so vaguely that I cannot tell what his troubles are, and I do not like to question him about them.'

We went on to the theatre in silence. My darling was very pensive. All the brightness and happiness of the last fortnight seemed to have vanished: the time of parting was so near, the sweet brief midsummer dream was coming to a dreary end.

'I wonder whether I shall ever see him again, Patty, after he leaves this place?' Lucy said to me when we were close to the stage-door.

'Of course you will, dear, if he loves you, as I am sure he does,' I answered, for her plaintive look and tone went to my heart.

'I don't know that. He spoke of our parting last night as if it was to be for ever; as if it was a good thing for both of us, somehow, that we are going to part.'

That Saturday was the warmest day we had had yet—blazing sunshine, and scarcely a breath of air. All the company was crowded into the little garden where the gooseberry-bushes grew. Mr. Macdonald was there too, lounging on the bench under the sycamore tree, with one newspaper in his hand and another on the ground at his feet.

The Slowmington press had not been kind to him. His acting was handled very severely in both the newspapers which had come out that bright June morning. He read the critiques aloud, and laughed at them with a bitter strident laugh, and cursed the critics of Slowmington very freely. He was so engrossed by this occupation that he did not look up as Lucy and I came into the garden. Yes, the dream was over; this Saturday morning was the awakening. We went into the green-room, and Lucy sat down in a corner to study her part. She had a very important character in a comedy to play that night,

and I think her mind was so full of other things that she found it harder than usual to cram the words into her poor little head. We were quite alone in the green-room, but we could hear the voices in the garden outside, and Mr. Macdonald's bitter laughter. He came in by-and-by, and shook hands with Lucy; but there was no happy talk in foreign languages between those two to-day. Of course the Slowmington critics were utterly insignificant and contemptible in his eyes, as he declared they were; but I think the adverse criticism galled him a little nevertheless. And then his engagement had been altogether an unprofitable one. It was scarcely strange that he should look discontented and gloomy this morning.

The rehearsal was a long one, and dragged on wearily for several hours. The last thing to be rehearsed was a farce in which there were very few characters—only Mr. Macdonald, Mr. Fitzwarren the walking gentleman, Lucy Derwent, and myself. We were rehearsing this quite late in the afternoon, and Lucy and I were together in the green-room while the two men were on the stage, when Mr. Ponsonby came in from a little closet-like room

that was called the treasury, where he transacted all the business of the theatre, with the casts of the pieces for the following week, and began to hang them up in the little frame over the chimney-piece. Yes, the world was to go on all the same after Roderick Macdonald was gone, and pieces were to be studied and acted, and all the common round of daily drudgery was to continue, just as if that bright break in Lucy Derwent's life had never come. I knew she was thinking this as she looked up wearily at Mr. Ponsonby, without a spark of interest in the pieces for the coming week, about which she would have been so curious and eager a fortnight ago. The manager loitered a little over his task, whistling softly to himself, dawdling for a purpose, I fancied; and in that moment a nervous feeling came over me, just as if I had known that there was something painful coming.

'Macdonald seems rather out of sorts to-day,' he said at last, with his back still towards us, as he stood at the mantelpiece. 'They certainly have walked into him awfully in the *Mercury* and *Midland Chronicle;* but it doesn't need much

of a critic to see that the man's no actor. I suppose he'll go home to his wife, after his Hammerford engagement, and that she'll console him for all his failures.'

'His wife!' I cried, turning cold and faint. 'Is Mr. Macdonald married?'

'So it seems,' Mr. Ponsonby answered, looking round at us for the first time. 'I didn't know it till this morning, or I should'—he hesitated for a moment, looking at Lucy—'I should have let others know it. I had a letter from a friend in London by to-day's post, telling me a good deal about our friend Macdonald. He has been married ever since he was quite a youth to a Frenchwoman ten years his senior. I don't know if they live together; but she is a very handsome woman, I hear, and was on the stage in Paris when he first saw her. I suppose it was this marriage that gave him a fancy for turning actor.'

I don't know whether he meant to be cruel; jealousy and anger had made him hard, perhaps, even towards Lucy. I know that the blow struck home. The fair young face grew white to the very

lips, but my poor darling betrayed her trouble by no other sign just then. There was a dead silence in the room, and we heard Mr. Macdonald's step on the gravel in the little garden outside as he came out of the theatre. What a leaden gloom there seemed in the place, which was wont to be so noisy and uproarious with the talk and laughter of the actors!

Lucy got up from her seat presently, and went slowly out of the room. I knew that she was going straight to speak to Mr. Macdonald, to ask him whether this thing was true or not. I was sitting by the window, and could see him as he sat on his favourite seat under the sycamore, leaning forward with a very gloomy face, and scratching figures on the gravel with the point of his cane. He looked very interesting, I thought, with that melancholy expression in his pale face; and there was more pity for him than anger against him in my heart. Mr. Ponsonby thrust his hands in his pockets, and planted himself with his back against the empty fireplace, in a dogged kind of way.

'She ought to know it,' he muttered. 'It is only right for her to know.'

'I think you might have broken it to her a little more kindly,' I said to him, rather indignantly.

'Broken it! stuff and nonsense!' he answered, angrily. 'What breaking can there be wanted in such a case? What can she care about a man whom she has only known a fortnight—a dire bad actor into the bargain? I'm sure his buffoonery in Charles Surface, and his gagging in Young Marlow, were beneath contempt.'

I did not reply to this; I was looking out at the scene under the sycamore tree.

Lucy had gone slowly up to Mr. Macdonald, and had asked him some question. I could see the pale lips move, though the voice was so low and faint that I could not hear so much as a murmur. I saw him look up at her with a start, and with a sudden sharp anguish in his face that made it haggard and old-looking all in a moment.

'Yes,' he said at last, 'the murder's out. It's true. Some kind friend has told you, I suppose. Yes, it's true;' and then, as she stood before him silently, he stretched out his hands to her in a pleading, despairing way.

'Oh, my love, my love, forgive me!' he cried.

Lucy Derwent gave a little gasping sob, and fell down at his feet in a dead faint. I ran out to the garden directly, the manager after me. Mr. Macdonald had raised her from the ground by that time, and was holding her in his arms, imploring her to forgive him, and calling himself a brute and a villain.

'Yes, you may well say that. You have proved yourself a most consummate villain!' Mr. Ponsonby said, savagely.

The Scotchman turned on him fiercely, with his fists clenched, and I remembered that propensity for knocking people down for which this gentleman had distinguished himself.

He did not attack Mr. Ponsonby, however, and bore the reproof meekly enough.

'*You* needn't insult me,' he said, in a gloomy tone. 'You needn't hit a fellow that's down. I'm low enough, God knows. I know that I have been a villain to her, but not a deliberate villain. I love her with all my heart and soul. If she would trust herself to me, I would be her slave, would sacrifice every hope I have in the world for her sake. Yet I

love her so well, that I would not ask her to do that for my life. She is as innocent and pure as the angels, and I have not said a word to her that I might not say to my sister. But I love her—O my God, how I love her!'

He held her all this time, supported by one strong arm, and with her fair head lying on his breast, happily unconscious still. He looked down at her—oh, so tenderly!—as the sweet pale face lay there.

'No, my love,' he said, with a smile, 'I will not wrong you by so much as a kiss unawares.'

She came back to life presently with a convulsive sigh, and I think the fulness of her trouble flashed upon her with the first moment of returning consciousness.

'Let us go home, Patty,' she said, quietly; 'the rehearsal is finished, isn't it?'

It was not quite finished; but Mr. Ponsonby nodded to me, and said, 'Yes, get her home.'

Mr. Macdonald had withdrawn his arm from her the moment she recovered. He stood a little way apart now, watching her with a look that was half

tenderness, half despair. I have no doubt I ought to have been very angry with him for the duplicity that had caused all this mischief; but I could not for the life of me feel anything but pity for him.

We walked slowly home in the afternoon sunshine, Lucy leaning on my arm. I did not speak to her once in all the way. I knew that such a grief as hers would be best suffered in silence, and that any attempt at consolation must be worse than useless. She went straight to her room when we got home, and I promised to take her a cup of tea there presently. We were in the habit of taking tea and dinner together after a late rehearsal, in the homely fashion which women like; but I felt pretty sure that Lucy would eat little or nothing this afternoon.

When I went to her with the tea, I found her sitting with a play-book on her lap, staring absently at the page. She had not even taken off her walking things. I took off her hat and mantle, and got her to bathe her face in cold water, and sat by her while she drank a cup of tea, and ate a little piece of bread-and-butter, to please me. Then I persuaded her to lie down upon the bed, and rest until it was time to

go to the theatre. It was no good trying to study—the words would come to her somehow at night, I had no doubt. She obeyed me in her own sweet, gentle way, and I darkened the room for her, and left her lying down with her face turned to the wall.

Up to this time she had not shed a tear; but I think the tears came all at once now; for when I crept softly to her door a few minutes later I heard her low, suppressed sobbing, and I was not sorry that this relief should come to her.

At six o'clock she came to our sitting-room, with a pale fixed face, but no obvious traces of her tears, dressed ready to start for the theatre. We walked there together, she and I, my sister not being wanted till a later hour. How the fashionable life of Slowmington jarred upon me that evening!—the gaily-dressed people walking and driving in the serene sunshine, the bright-looking shops, the aspect of happiness that there was in the place.

I don't think Lucy Derwent ever acted so well as she acted that night. I had been afraid that she might break down; and had only hoped at the best that she would get through her parts somehow. But

the fever and excitement of her mind gave a new vivacity to her acting. She threw herself into the character she was playing with an utter abandonment. Mr. Ponsonby stood at the wing, wondering at her brightness and animation.

'She's not much the worse for my news, you see,' he said to me with rather a triumphant air, 'in spite of her faint this afternoon: girls faint for next to nothing. Of course it was only a flirtation on her side, whatever it may have been on Macdonald's, and the poor beggar did look awfully cut up, I confess.'

'Oh, of course,' I said, not caring to contradict him.

I saw Lucy and Mr. Macdonald at the wings in the intervals of their acting, talking together very earnestly. He told her the story of his life that night, a story which she told me afterwards, a common story enough, of a boy's foolish marriage and a man's bitter repentance. The night came to an end only too soon for those two, I think, who found some sweetness amongst the pain of those parting hours. I did not witness their final farewell; they were

alone together in the little garden for a few minutes while I finished dressing—Lucy waiting for me to join her. Perhaps I purposely lingered a little over my toilet that night, willing that they should have those last moments together.

Mr. Macdonald had gone when I went downstairs, and Lucy was waiting for me alone in the garden. It was a wet night; but I doubt if the poor child knew it was raining till I told her so.

'He is gone, Patty,' she said, 'for ever and ever. I shall never see him again. It is better so, of course; but, oh, how blank and dull the world will seem without him, and what an old, old woman I feel!'

'My dear love, all that will pass away. Why, you have only known him two short weeks! It cannot be a very serious feeling on either side.'

'You don't know, Patty. Those two weeks seem half my life to me, and the brightest half of my life. He asked me to let him kiss me; just once, Patty.' He stood by my side, bare-headed, pleading so earnestly just for one kiss, and I said, "No." But now he is gone, I wish I had let him kiss me; I wish I had not been so hard and cruel.'

'My dear child, you only did what was right he has had a great deal too much indulgence as it is. He had no right to conceal the fact of his marriage, or to flirt with you as he did.'

'He had not the heart to tell me the truth. Don't be hard upon him, Patty. You don't know how generous and noble he is. I don't think there's a woman in the world who could help loving him. Oh, how I wish I had let him kiss me!'

She trusted me so thoroughly, poor child, and laid her heart bare before me with such entire candour and simplicity. Many, many times after that night, in our talk of Roderick Macdonald she would return to the old regret: 'Oh, Patty, I wish I had let him kiss me!'

Our lives went on quietly and peacefully enough after the star had vanished out of our tranquil sky. Lucy Derwent did not fall ill of a brain fever, as she ought to have done perhaps under the circumstances, nor did she exhibit any outward tokens of her grief. She took more pains with her acting than usual, I know, and seemed as gay and light-hearted as ever in the green-room, where she knew there were eager

eyes watching for any sign of her trouble. But at home, with us whom she trusted, she was sadly changed. She would sit alone in her room for hours together, with an open book lying unheeded on her lap; and when we persuaded her to join us she was dull and silent, and we never heard her old joyous laugh, or her pretty voice singing over her work. She suffered all the more at home, I think, on account of the effort which she made to appear her old self at the theatre.

We heard of Mr. Macdonald at the different towns, where he was starring with more or less success; and then, at the end of about six months, there came the news that he was going to Australia, to try his dramatic fortunes in that colony.

'I was right, you see, Patty,' Lucy said to me, when she read this announcement in a theatrical journal; 'I shall never see him again.'

'My dear child, he will come back from Australia in a year or so, I dare say, and there will be just as good a chance of your seeing him as if he had never been there.'

'No, Patty, I shall never see him again. We

both felt that last miserable night that we should never meet again; and he asked me to let him kiss me, and I wouldn't.'

It was midsummer weather again, and we were at Slowmington once more, Lucy still with us, and Mr. Ponsonby more devoted to her than ever. She had brightened a good deal by this time, and I thought she was beginning to forget Mr. Macdonald. She was a great favourite with the audience in all our three towns, and her salary had been raised; so that she was able to send home a little money to her mother now and then, which helped that anxious housekeeper in some of her minor embarrassments.

'If it is only enough to pay the milk bill, it is something, you see, Patty,' Lucy said to me in her candid way.

And so the time went on, peacefully enough. We had an especially prosperous season at Slowmington that year, and the autumn found us still at the pretty little inland watering-place. Early in October George Ponsonby's fidelity had its reward, and I had the happiness of appearing in the character of bridesmaid

to Lucy Derwent, who signed herself 'Lucy Dawson in the register, by the way, in which record Mr. Ponsonby wrote himself down 'George Payne.'

Yes, she had accepted this faithful lover at last, grateful for his devotion, flattered by his belief in her talents, and preferring the tranquil home he could give her to the worries and confusions of her father's house. That she really loved him, I did not for a moment believe; but I was pleased that she should marry him, nevertheless, and I had no doubt that the quiet, undemonstrative affection which best insures the happiness of domestic life would grow up in my darling's heart in good time. I knew that she was faithful and true, and that she would neglect no duty which she pledged herself to perform before the altar in the shadowy old parish church. Nor was I mistaken in this. She made the fairest, brightest, most delightful wife that ever a man won for himself, and her husband seemed to grow prouder of her, and fonder of her every day. He was very generous to her too, and she told me she was now able to send frequent help to the poor overtasked mother at home.

They had been married nearly six months, and we were at Drifford, a manufacturing town, very black and smoky, famous for gigantic pigs and savoury pork pies. The inhabitants consumed enormous quantities of pork pie in the pit and gallery during the evening's entertainment; indeed, if times were bad, and these people could not afford ample supplies of pork pie, they would stay away from the theatre, preferring to abstain from the drama altogether, rather than witness it unfortified by their favourite refreshment. We were at Drifford, and it was the end of March—gloomy, blustrous weather, with a cold gray sky, and frequent showers of wind-driven rain that used to beat into my face and almost blind me during the walk from my lodgings to the theatre—and I think I remember this time especially on account of an event which tried my poor Lucy's fortitude sorely.

I was at rehearsal on one of these cold rainy mornings, when the theatre had an unusually dark and dismal appearance, and when every member of the company seemed either out of temper or out of spirits. I was standing at one of the wings, trying

to cram the words of a long unprofitable part into my head, when the manager came up to me.

'Oh, Patty,' he said—he had taken to calling me 'Patty,' like his wife,—'I wish you would just step round and have a little chat with Lucy; she's not quite the thing this morning, and I dare say you can cheer her up if you try.'

'I should be very pleased to go to her,' I said, 'but I'm on all through this piece.'

'Never mind that. It'll be rehearsed again to-morrow, you know. Wilcox shall read your part. There, run along, that's a good soul, and look after Lucy.'

I could see that he was very pale, and had a troubled look which I had never seen in his face since that Saturday night at Slowmington. I hurried out of the theatre, and to Mr. Ponsonby's lodgings, which were very pleasant rooms not far off. I know the drawing-room used to seem to me quite a splendid apartment, which I fancied any lady might have been proud to occupy. But then I had not seen many drawing-rooms, and this may have appeared to me grander than it really was

Lucy made very light of her luxurious surroundings.

She came to me, a few moments after I had been shown into this room, pale to the lips, and with an unspeakable sadness in her face. She had a newspaper in one hand, and she was still holding this when she threw herself into my arms, and hid her poor white face upon my shoulder.

'I heard that you were ill, dear,' I said, 'and Mr. Ponsonby sent me here to see if I could be of any use to my pet. You know how anxious he always is about you.'

'He is very good to me,' she answered, in a low, tremulous voice; 'oh, so much better than I deserve. He knows now how unworthy I am of his goodness. I kept my secret from him till to-day, but he knows all now.'

'All what, you foolish child?'

'He is dead, Patty,' she answered, with a sob.

'Who is dead?'

'Roderick Macdonald. It was in the paper this morning. He died at Melbourne, of rheumatic fever. He was only twenty-nine. Oh, Patty, I

told you that I should never see him again. And to think that he should have prayed so hard for that one last kiss, and I refused it! He is dead, Patty. Oh, if I could only have kissed him in his coffin!'

'My darling, this talk is so foolish—wicked even. I am very sorry to hear of Mr. Macdonald's death; but, if he had lived, no good could have come out of a meeting between you and him. You have no right to grieve for him like this, Lucy.'

'Oh, I know that,' she answered, impatiently. 'No right! I tell you, Patty, he was the only man I ever loved in all my life.'

'Oh, Lucy! And your poor good husband!'

'I told him I had no heart to give him. I only promised to do my duty.'

'And you will keep that promise, darling, and love will come by and by. Yes, it will come, my dear, I am sure of that; and you will forget that you ever cared for Roderick Macdonald.'

She shook her head sadly, and then we sat down side by side, her poor weary head resting on my shoulder. She showed me the brief paragraph in the

London paper by and by, and I let her talk as long as she pleased about her dead lover. I knew somehow that things would come right in time; and so they did. Time drew Lucy's gentle heart nearer to her good and faithful husband, and took the edge off that old regret. Mr. and Mrs. Ponsonby have three pretty children, and seem to me a perfectly happy couple; but I think even yet there are moments when Lucy's thoughts slip away from the little one on her lap, and there rises before her the vision of a face that shall never be seen again upon this earth.

THE SCENE-PAINTER'S WIFE.

'You wouldn't think it to look at her now, sir,' said the old clown, as he shook the ashes out of his blackened clay, 'but madam was once as handsome a woman as you'd see for many a long day. It was an accident that spoilt her beauty.'

The speaker was attached to a little equestrian company with which I had fallen in during a summer day's pedestrianism in Warwickshire. The troupe had halted at a roadside inn, where I was dawdling over my mid-day meal, and by the time I had smoked my cigar in his companionship, the clown and I were upon a footing of perfect friendliness.

I had been not a little struck by the woman of whom he spoke. She was tall and slim, and had something of a foreign look, as I thought. Her face

was chiefly remarkable for the painful impression which it gave to a stranger. It was the face of a woman who had suffered some great terror. The sickly pallor of the skin was made conspicuous by the hectic brightness of the large black eyes, and on one cheek there was a scar—the mark of some deadly hurt inflicted long ago.

My new friend and I had strolled a little way from the inn, where the rest of the company were still occupied with their frugal dinner. A stretch of sunny common lay before us, and seemed to invite a ramble. The clown filled his pipe and walked on meditatively. I took out another cigar.

'Was it a fall from horseback that gave her that scar?' I asked.

'A fall from horseback! Madame Delavanti! No, sir, that seam on her cheek was made by the claws of a tiger. It's rather a curious sort of story, and I don't mind telling it, if you'd like to hear it, but for goodness' sake don't let her know I've been talking of her, if you should happen to scrape acquaintance with her when you go back to the inn.

'Has she such a dislike to being talked about?'

'I rather think she has. You see she's not quite right in the upper story, poor soul; but she's a clipper to ride, and doesn't know what fear means. You'd scarcely believe how handsome she looks at night when she's dressed for the ring. Her face lights up almost as well as it used to do ten years ago, before she had the accident. Ah, she was a beauty in those days, and used to be run after by all the gentlemen like mad. But she never was a bad lot, never—wild and self-willed, but never a wicked woman, as I'll stake my life. I've been her friend through thick and thin when she needed a friend, and I've understood her better than others.

'She was only twelve years old when first she came to us with her father, a noted lion-tamer. He was a man who drank hard now and then, and was very severe with her at such times; but she always had a brave spirit, and I never knew her to quail before him or before the beasts. She used to take her share in all the old man's performances, and when he died and the lions were sold off our proprietor kept a tiger for her to perform with. He was the cleverest of all the animals, but a queer

temper, and it needed a spirit like Caroline Delavanti's to face him. She used to ride in the circus as well as perform with the tiger, and she was altogether the most valuable member of the company, and was very well paid for her work. She was eighteen when her father died, and within a year of his death she married Joseph Waylie, our scene-painter.

'I was rather surprised at this marriage, for I fancied Caroline might have done better. Joe was thirty-five, if he was a day—a pale, sandy-haired fellow, not much to look at, and by no means a genius. But he was awfully fond of Caroline. He had followed her about like a dog ever since she came among us, and I thought she married him more out of pity than love. I told her so one day, but she only laughed and said,—

'"He's too good for me, Mr. Waters, that's the truth. I don't deserve to be loved as he loves me."

'The newly-married couple seemed to be very happy together. It was a treat to see Joe stand at the wing and watch his wife through her performances, ready to put a shawl over her pretty

white shoulders when she had done, or to throw himself between her and the tiger in case of mischief. She treated him in a pretty patronizing sort of way, as if he had been ever so much younger than she, instead of twelve years her senior. She used to stand upon tiptoe and kiss him before all the company sometimes at a rehearsal, much to his delight. He worked like a slave in the hope of improving his position as he improved in his art, and he thought nothing too good for his beautiful young wife. They had very comfortable lodgings about half a mile from the manufacturing town where we were stationed for the winter months, and lived as well as simple folks need live.

'Our manager was proprietor of a second theatre, at a seaport town fifty miles away; and when pantomime time was coming on, poor Joseph Waylie was ordered off to paint the scenery for this other theatre, much to his grief, as his work was likely to keep him a month or six weeks away from his wife. It was their first parting, and the husband felt it deeply. He left Caroline to the care of an old woman who took the money, and who professed

a very warm attachment for Mrs. Waylie, or Madame Delavanti, as she was called in the bills.

'Joseph had not been gone much more than a week when I began to take notice of a young officer who was in front every evening, and who watched Caroline's performance with evident admiration. I saw him one night in very close conversation with Mrs. Muggleton, the money-taker, and was not over-pleased to hear Madame Delavanti's name mentioned in the course of their conversation. On the next night I found him loitering about at the stage door. He was a very handsome man, and I could not avoid taking notice of him. On inquiry, I found that his name was Jocelyn, and that he was a captain in the regiment then stationed in the town. He was the only son of a wealthy manufacturer, I was told, and had plenty of money to throw about.

'I had finished my performance earlier than usual one night soon after this, and was waiting for a friend at the stage door, when Captain Jocelyn came up the dark by-street, smoking his cigar, and evidently waiting for some one. I fell back into the shadow of the doorway, and waited, feeling pretty sure that

he was on the watch for Caroline. I was right. She came out presently and joined him, putting her hand under his arm, as if it was quite a usual thing for him to be her escort. I followed them at a little distance as they walked off, and waited till I saw Joe's wife safe within her own door. The captain detained her on the door-step talking for a few minutes, and evidently would have liked to have kept her there longer, but she dismissed him with that pretty imperious way she had with all of us at times.

'Now, as a very old friend of Caroline's, I wasn't going to stand this sort of thing; so I taxed her with it plainly next day, and told her no good could come of any acquaintance between her and Captain Jocelyn.

'"And no harm need come of it either, you silly old fellow," she said. "I've been used to that sort of attention all my life. There's nothing but the most innocent flirtation between us."

'"What would Joe think of such an innocent flirtation, Caroline?" I asked.

'"Joe must learn to put up with such things," she

answered, "as long as I do my duty to him. I can't live without excitement, and admiration, and that sort of thing. Joe ought to know that as well as I do."

'"I should have thought the tiger and the horses would have given you enough excitement, Caroline," I said, "without running into worse dangers than the risk of your life."

'"But they don't give me half enough excitement," she answered; and then she took out a little watch in a jewelled case, and looked at it, and then at me in a half-boastful, half-nervous way.

'"Why, what a pretty watch, Carry!" said I. "Is that a present from Joe?"

'"As if you didn't know better than that!" she said. "Country scene-painters can't afford to buy diamond watches for their wives, Mr. Waters."

'I tried to lecture her, but she laughed off my reproaches; and I saw her that night with a bracelet on her arm which I knew must be another gift from the captain. He was in a stage box, and threw her a bouquet of choice flowers after her scene with the tiger. It was the prettiest sight in the world to see

her pick up the flowers and offer them to the grim-looking animal to smell, and then snatch them away with a laugh, and retire, curtseying to the audience and glancing coquettishly towards the box where her admirer sat applauding her.

'Three weeks went by like this, the captain in front every night. I kept a close watch upon the pair, for I thought that, however she might carry on her flirtation, Joe's wife was true at heart, and would not do him any deliberate wrong. She was very young and very wilful, but I fancied my influence would go a long way with her in any desperate emergency. So I kept an eye upon her and her admirer, and there was rarely a night that I did not see the captain's back turned upon the door of Mrs. Waylie's lodgings before I went home to my own supper.

'Joe was not expected home for another week, and the regiment was to leave the town in a couple of days. Caroline told me this one morning with evident pleasure, and I was overjoyed to find she did not really care for Captain Jocelyn.

"'Not a bit, you silly old man," she said; "I like his admiration, and I like his presents, but I know

there's no one in the world worth Joe. I'm very glad the regiment will be gone when Joe comes back. I shall have had my bit of fun, you know, and I shall tell Joe all about it; and as Captain Jocelyn will have gone to the other end of the world, he can't object to the presents—tributes offered to my genius, as the captain says in his notes."

'I felt by no means sure that Joseph Waylie would consent to his wife's retaining these tributes, and I told her as much.

'"Oh, nonsense!" she said; "I can do what I like with Joe. He'll be quite satisfied when he sees Captain Jocelyn's respectful letters. I couldn't part with my darling little watch for the world."

'When I went to the theatre next evening I found the captain standing talking to Caroline just inside the stage door. He seemed very earnest, and was begging her to do something which she said was impossible. It was his last night in the town, you see, and I have very little doubt that he was asking her to run away with him—for I believe the man was over head and ears in love with her—and that she was putting him off in her laughing, coquettish way.

'"I won't take your answer now," he said, very seriously. "I shall wait for you at the door to-night. You can't mean to break my heart, Caroline; the answer must be, 'Yes.'"

'She broke away from him hurriedly. "Hark!" she said, "there's the overture; and in half an hour I must be upon the stage."

'I passed the captain in the dark passage, and a few paces farther on passed some one else whose face I could not see, but whose short, hurried breathing sounded like that of a person who had been running. We brushed against one another as we passed, but the man took no notice of me.

'Half an hour afterwards I was lounging in a corner of the ring while Caroline went through her performances with the tiger. Captain Jocelyn was in his usual place, with a bouquet in his hand. It was New Year's night, and the house was very full. I had been looking all round for some time, when I was startled by the sight of a face in the pit. It was Joseph Waylie's face, ashy pale, and fixed as death—a face that meant mischief.

'"He has heard something against his wife," I

thought. "I'll run round to him directly I can get out of the ring, and make matters square. Some confounded scandal-monger has got hold of him, and has been poisoning his mind about Caroline and the captain." I knew there had been a good deal of talk in the theatre about those two—talk which I had done my best to put down.

'Captain Jocelyn threw his bouquet, which was received with a coquettish smile and a bright upward glance that seemed to express profound delight. I knew that this was mere stage-play; but how must it have looked to the jealous man, glaring with fixed eyes from his place at the back of the pit! I turned to look at him as the curtain fell upon the stage, but he was gone. He was going round to speak to his wife, no doubt. I left the ring immediately, and went to prepare her for the interview, and, if needful, to stand between her and her husband's anger.

'I found her at the wing, trifling with her bouquet in an absent way.

'"Have you seen Joe?" I asked.

'"No," she answered. "He hasn't come back, has he? I didn't expect him for a week."

'"I know, my dear; but I saw him in the pit just now, looking as pale as a ghost. I'm afraid some one has been talking to him about you."

'She looked rather frightened when I said this.

'"They can't say any harm of me if they speak the truth," she said. "I wonder Joe didn't come straight to me though, instead of going to the front of the house."

'We were both wanted in the ring. I helped Caroline through her equestrian performance, and saw that she was a little nervous and anxious about Joe's return. She did not favour the captain with many more smiles that evening, and she told me to be ready for her at the stage door ten minutes before the performance was over.

'"I want to give Captain Jocelyn the slip," she said; "but I dare say Joe will come to me before I'm ready."

'Joe did not appear, however, and she went home with me. I met the captain on my way back, and he asked me if I had been seeing Mrs. Waylie home. I told him yes, and that her husband had come home. Joe had not arrived at the lodgings,

however, when Caroline went in, and I returned to the theatre to look for him. The stage door was shut when I went back; so I supposed that Joe had gone home by another way, or was out drinking. I went to bed that night very uneasy in my mind about Caroline and her husband.

'There was an early rehearsal of a new interlude next morning, and Caroline came into the theatre five minutes after I got there. She looked pale and ill. Her husband had not been home.

'"I think it must have been a mistake of yours about Joe," she said to me. "I don't think it could have been he you saw in the pit last night."

'"I saw him as surely as I see you at this moment, my dear," I answered. "There's no possibility of a mistake. Joe came back last night, and Joe was in the pit while you were on with the tiger."

'This time she looked really frightened. She put her hand to her heart suddenly, and began to tremble.

'"Why didn't he come home to me?" she cried, "and where did he hide himself last night?"

'"I'm afraid he must have gone out upon the drink, my dear."'

'"Joe never drinks,"' she answered.

'While she stood looking at me with that pale scared face, one of our young men came running towards us.

'"You're wanted, Waters," he said, shortly.

'"Where?"

'"Upstairs in the painting-room."

'"Joe's room!" cried Caroline. "Then he has come back. I'll go with you."

'She was following me as I crossed the stage, but the young man tried to stop her.

'"You'd better not come just yet, Mrs. Waylie," he said, in a hurried way. "It's only Waters that's wanted on a matter of business." And then, as Caroline followed close behind us, he took hold of my arm and whispered, "Don't let her come."

'I tried to keep her back, but it was no use.

'"I know it's my husband who wants you," she said. "They've been making mischief about me. You shan't keep me away from him."

'We were on the narrow stairs leading to the

painting-room by this time. I couldn't keep Caroline off. She pushed past both of us, and ran into the room before we could stop her.

'"Serve her right," muttered my companion. "It's all her doing."

'I heard her scream as I came to the door. There was a little crowd in the painting-room round a quiet figure lying on a bench, and there was a ghastly pool of blood upon the floor. Joseph Waylie had cut his throat.

'"He must have done it last night," said the manager. "There's a letter for his wife on the table yonder. Is that you, Mrs. Waylie? A bad business, isn't it? Poor Joseph!"

'Caroline knelt down by the side of the bench, and stopped there on her knees, as still as death, till the room was clear of all but me.

'"They think I deserve this, Waters," she said, lifting her white face from the dead man's shoulder, where she had hidden it; "but I meant no harm. Give me the letter."

'"You'd better wait a bit, my dear," I said.

'"No, no; give it me at once, please."

'I ga ve her the letter. It was very short. The scene-painter had come back to the theatre in time to hear some portion of that interview between Captain Jocelyn and his wife. He evidently had believed her much more guilty than she was.

'"I think you must know how I loved you, Caroline," he wrote; "I can't face life with the knowledge that you've been false to me."

'Of course there was an inquest. We worked it so that the jury gave a verdict of temporary insanity, and poor Joe was buried decently in the cemetery outside the town. Caroline sold the watch and the bracelet that Captain Jocelyn had given her, in order to pay for her husband's funeral. She was very quiet, and went on with the performances as usual a week after Joe's death, but I could see a great change in her. The rest of the company were very hard upon her, as I thought, blaming her for her husband's death, and she was under a cloud, as it were; but she looked as handsome as ever, and went through all her performances in her old daring way. I'm sure, though, that she grieved sincerely for Joe's death, and that she had never meant to do him wrong.

'We travelled all through the next summer, and late in November went back to Homersleigh. Caroline had seemed happier while we were away, I thought, and when we were going back she confessed as much to me.

'"I've got a kind of dread of seeing that place again," she said; "I'm always dreaming of the painting-room as it looked that January morning with the cold light streaming in upon that dreadful figure on the bench. That room has scarcely been out of my dreams one night since I've been away from Homersleigh; and now I dread going back as if—as if *he* was shut up there."

'The room was not a particularly convenient one, and it had been used for lumber after Joe's death. The man who came after him didn't care to paint there by himself all day long. On the first morning of our return, Caroline went up and looked in at the dusty heap of disused stage furniture and broken properties. I met her coming away from the room.

'"Oh, Mr. Waters," she said to me with real feeling, "if he had only waited to hear me speak for myself! They all think I deserved what happened,

and perhaps I did, as far as it was a punishment for my vanity and foolishness; but Joe didn't deserve such a fate. I know it was their malicious talk that did the mischief."

'I fancied after this that her looks changed for the worse, and that she had a kind of nervous way in going through her work in the ring, as if there was a fever upon her. I couldn't judge so well how she went through the tiger act, as I was never on the stage with her, but the brute seemed as submissive as ever. On the last day of the year she asked our manager to let her off for the next night. "It's the anniversary of my husband's death," she said.

'"I didn't know you were so precious fond of him," he answered, with a sneer. "No, Mrs. Waylie, we can't afford to dispense with your services to-morrow night. The tiger act is one of our strong features with the gallery, and I expect a full house for New Year's night."

'She begged him very hard to let her off, but it was no use. There was no rehearsal on New Year's morning, and she went to the little cemetery where Joe was buried, a three miles' walk in the

cold and rain. In the evening, when she came to the wing, her eyes were brighter than usual, and she shivered a good deal, more than I liked to see.

'"I think I must have caught cold in the cemetery to-day," she said to me when I noticed this. "I wish I could have kept this night sacred—this one night—to my husband's memory. He has been in my mind so much to-day."

'She went on, and I stood at the wing watching her. The audience applauded vociferously, but she did not make her accustomed curtsey; and she went about her work in a listless way that was very different from her usual spirited style. The animal seemed to know this, and when she had got about half way through her tricks with him he began to respond to her word of command in a sulky, unwilling manner that I didn't like. This made her angry, and she used her light whip more freely than usual.

'One of the tiger's concluding tricks was a leap through a garland of flowers which Caroline held for him. She was kneeling in the centre of the stage with this garland in her hands, ready for the

animal's spring, when her eyes wandered to the front of the house, and she rose suddenly, with a shrill scream, and her arms outstretched wildly. Whether the sulky brute thought that she was going to strike him or not, I don't know; but he sprang savagely at her as she rose, and in the next moment she was lying on the ground helpless, and the audience screaming with terror. I rushed upon the stage with half a dozen others, and we had the brute muzzled and roped in a few breathless moments, but not before he had torn Caroline's cheek and shoulder with his claws. She was insensible when we carried her off the stage, and she was confined to her bed three months after the accident with brain fever. When she came among us again she had lost every vestige of colour, and her face had that set look which you must have observed just now.

'The fright of her encounter with the tiger gave her that look,' I said; 'I don't much wonder at it.'

'Not a bit of it,' answered the clown. 'That's the curious part of the story. She didn't think anything of her skirmish with the tiger, though it quite spoilt her beauty. What frightened her was

the sight of her husband sitting in the pit, as he had sat there a year before, on the night of his death Of course you'll say it was a delusion, and so say I. But she declares she saw him sitting amongst the crowd—amongst them, and yet not one of them, somehow, with a ghastly glare upon his face that marked him out from the rest. It was the sight of him that made her drop her garland and give that scream and start which frightened the tiger. You see she had been brooding upon his death for a long time, and no doubt she conjured up his image out of her own brain, as it were. She's never been quite the same since that fever; but she has plenty of pluck, and there's scarcely anything she can't do now with Baber the tiger, and I think she's fonder of him than of any human creature, in spite of the scar on her cheek.'

SIR LUKE'S RETURN.

To say that Cadbury Hall had stood untenanted and dismantled within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Cadbury village would be to say too much, for there were two or three aged men and women in Springfield Union who remembered old Sir Luke Cadbury, and the good old days when the hounds used to meet in front of Cadbury Hall, and old Sir Luke, steeped to the lips in debt, and with every acre of his estate encumbered, used to keep open house, and entertain the county in a liberal and large-hearted fashion, at the expense of the local tradesmen. Having mortgaged his last acre, and plunged as deep in debt as his creditors would allow, old Sir Luke found himself at the end of his tether; so he took the easiest way out of his difficulties by dying, and leaving the empty shell of his estate to his only son.

Young Sir Luke, not seeing his way to living luxuriously upon an estate whose revenues were swallowed up by the mortgagees, looked about him for some more promising mode of existence. He was nineteen years of age when he came into his property. He had been at an expensive public school, where he had learned to row, swim, and thrash boys of superior weight and size. A little Latin and less Greek had been flogged into him, but, acquired thus unpleasantly, had oozed out of him very quickly. He took a day to learn a verb, with much tribulation of mind and sweat of brow, and he forgot it comfortably in half an hour. At home he learned to ride straight to hounds, and shoot his bird flying. Happily he was a young man of energetic temperament, an early riser, hardy, active, and simple in his tastes.

Feeling himself unfit for any of the learned professions, he turned his attention to commerce. People were beginning to look towards our antipodes as the source of fortune for adventurous spirits, and to associate Botany Bay with the wool trade, as well as with the exportation of our criminal classes. Sir

Luke Cadbury made up his mind that Sydney was the place for him, and wool his way to fortune. He let off every rood of the land, except his mother's flower-garden, for agricultural purposes; shut up the good old house, with its insignia of death hanging on the wall above the hall door; put the property into the hands of the family lawyer and land agent, and left Cadbury within three weeks of his father's funeral.

'If I am ever rich enough to pay off the mortgages, I shall do it,' said Sir Luke to his solicitor. 'I think my father reserved power to liquidate by instalments?'

'In all cases,' replied Mr. Dragmore, the lawyer, with a smile, for it seemed to him that no event in the history of the future could be farther off than the redemption of the Cadbury mortgages.

Young Sir Luke went away, and had not been in Australia three years before he began to send home money. Year by year from that time forward the Cadbury mortgages underwent reduction, until in something over twenty years the estate was free. John Dragmore, the family solicitor, went down to his grave wondering.

'That a son of old Sir Luke should have paid forty thousand pounds to the mortgagees, and twenty shillings in the pound to all his father's creditors!' he exclaimed on numerous occasions. 'To be sure, his mother was a Scotchwoman. That's the only way of accounting for it. It isn't in the Cadbury blood.'

Mr. Dragmore had been in his grave three-and-twenty years, and it was just forty-five years since young Sir Luke left Cadbury to make his fortune in wool. In all those years he had never returned to England. The fascination of wool, or of making money rapidly by that commodity, had kept him on the other side of the world. He had married early in life, and had lost his wife soon after marriage. That tie had never been renewed by him. He was a childless widower, and was supposed to be worth anything between a plum and a million. He was, therefore, even in the distance, an object of considerable interest to the Cadbury people, who passed the old Hall daily when they took their walks abroad, and saw the old mansion day after day in exactly the same condition, shutters closed, grass growing

on the threshold of the great iron gates, Farmer Mangle's cattle grazing in front of the Doric door. A tree or two had been blown down in the park, and the house had fallen into decay, but no other change had come over the old Hall; though Cadbury had expanded from a pastoral village into a smart little town, with plate-glass windows to its shops, and side streets of brand-new villas leading to nowhere.

Most of all was the great Australian wool merchant an object of interest to his next of kin. These were Mr. Grynde and his family at the Hollies, one of the neatest, most bandboxical places in the outskirts of Cadbury; and that reprobate young man, Waller Carlyon, who had very nearly brought his widowed mother's gray hairs in sorrow to the grave, by failing to pass his preliminary examination at the University of Oxford, or, in his own phraseology, being ploughed for smalls. He was not a brainless young man by any means, but was passionately fond of boating, and had given his attention to the geography of the Isis instead of the Scamander.

Samuel Grynde of the Hollies and Waller Carlyon stood in different degrees of relationship to Sir Luke

Cadbury, Waller's being a very remote kindred of the third or fourth cousin order, while Samuel was first cousin to the reigning baronet, and considered himself heir-presumptive to the estate.

Samuel's father, a person of somewhat plebeian extraction, but distinguished for his success in the legal profession, had married old Sir Luke's sister, and Samuel was the fruit of that union. His father had left him twelve hundred a year, upon which income he had married and brought up a large family, with credit to himself and the neighbourhood he honoured by his residence. He had adopted no profession, except that of vestryman and general busybody. He had a finger in every pie that was baked in Cadbury. Whatever project for the benefit of Cadbury was set on foot, Samuel Grynde was at the bottom of it. There was not five hundred feet of drain-pipe put in the ground at Cadbury without Mr. Grynde making a speech about it. He was great upon sewage; he was a terror to the authorities of the Springfield, Bilbury, and Cadbury Union, always wanting to know about that odd half-pound of butter, and who eat those mutton chops, and

whether the guardians' Worcester sauce and Bass's bitter were charged upon the parish. The luncheons of the guardians were always a stumbling-block to Mr. Grynde, and he would raise a whirlwind in the vestry by alluding to those mutton chops.

Mr. Grynde was spare in person, a man who eat very little himself, and objected to large appetites in other people. The young Grynides had rather a hard time of it while they were growing and hungry—their father denouncing a fourth slice of bread-and-butter as an indulgence of the lusts of the flesh. Mr. Grynde had a long nose, sharp as a bird's beak, a long neck, and a habit of lifting up his coat tails as he hovered on the edge of a sewer, or bent over a drain-pipe, which suggested a resemblance to a stork on the edge of a marshy pool.

Mr. Grynde's private opinion was that he had made Cadbury; that it was through his fostering and paternal care the village had spread itself out into a town; that the plate-glass windows, the loop line from Springfield Junction, and the new railway hotel, all emanated more or less from him. He had talked about these institutions in the vestry until he believed

in them as verily his own. Yet he was not a popular man in Cadbury. The blues had nicknamed him Sandy Stork, on account of the reddish tinge of his whiskers, and that propensity for hovering on the edge of open drains. The yellows called him 'Those mutton chops,' in memory of those field-days in the vestry on which he had thumped the table, and perorated like a second Chatham—Pitt the younger was too mild for him—on the malfeasance and misappropriation involved in the guardians' luncheons.

To Waller Carlyon Mr. Grynde objected on so many grounds that his objections were hydra-headed, and if you had subjugated one, another would have cropped up in its place. He objected to Waller as a ne'er-to-do-well, who had squandered his money at Oxford, as an impudent pretender to Sir Luke's relationship, and above all as an admirer of Mr. Grynde's third daughter, Lucy, a giddy light-hearted damsel, whom all Mr. Grynde's paternal teaching had failed to improve into that pattern of maidenhood for which Mr. Grynde had in a manner taken out a patent.

The two elder girls were perfect specimens of Mr.

Grynde's patent young woman. They played and sang duets like a pair of automaton performers, and were never out of time by so much as a demi-semiquaver. They read Racine, and nothing but Racine, in the French language. They had ploughed through Schiller's 'Thirty Years' War,' in the original, of course, and found it interesting. They played croquet at proper seasons, which meant on a Wednesday afternoon, which was their At Home day, when they wore their clean muslin frocks, and received the *élite* of Cadbury.

Lucy was a wild weed among these flowers. In her nursery and schoolroom days her pinafores had always been torn, one tail of chestnut hair *minus* its ribbon, her French and German verbs all at sea in the subjunctive mood, and her bootlaces broken. She had always been what Mr. Grynde called 'an outrage' on his sense of decency. Now that she was grown into bright, impulsive, blushing, alternate smiling and weeping girlhood, she was still an outrage. There was always something wrong—a bit of braid torn off the bottom of her dress, a new hat spoiled untimely by a shower, or she was late for

prayers, or she was out when she ought to be at home, or she liked people whom Mr. Grynde disliked, or squandered her allowance on unworthy objects of charity. And now she had filled the measure of her iniquities by falling in love with her father's natural enemy, Waller Carlyon, whose widowed mother had, possibly with a malice aforethought, taken a pretty Gothic cottage next door to Mr. Grynde's square bay-windowed villa.

The villa possessed a large garden of the modern order, sunk croquet lawn, raised banks, geraniums in square, geraniums in single file, like soldiers; no trees, except plums and peaches skewered against the new walls. The cottage had an old-fashioned garden and orchard, all in one, full of queer crooked old trees, deep soft grass, all hillocks and hollows, a wilderness of hazel and elder for a boundary between cottage garden and villa 'grounds.'

There was an old tumble-down fence dividing the wilderness from Mr. Grynde's kitchen-garden, which that gentleman would assuredly have replaced with a ten-foot wall had he not cherished hopes of getting that cottage and garden a bargain some day,

in which event he would have pulled down the cottage, and added the garden to his own domain.

Thus, in a laudable spirit of economy, he left the fence standing, and would not even lay out a sovereign on its repair.

'It's an eyesore, I admit,' he used to say, 'a blemish to grounds which I venture to think are otherwise perfect, but it would be folly to build a wall when I hope to enlarge in that direction by-and-by.'

This fence was at the bottom of all Lucy's troubles. She had torn her pinafores climbing it in the old nursery days, when the cottage was empty, and she and her brothers used to make raids into the orchard after half-ripened apples. It played the part of wall in the tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe now. Waller and Lucy were cousins—cousins at any rate, however remote the cousinship—and they had been more or less acquainted all their lives. When Mrs. Carlyon came to live at the cottage that acquaintance expanded considerably. They began by wishing each other good morning across the broken old fence; they went on to ex-

change slips and cuttings; they developed from this into the interesting study of botany, and before they had got very deep into that science, they found their eyes wandering from calyxes and petals to each other's faces, losing themselves in a sweet entanglement; and a little later they confessed that they adored each other.

'Papa would never hear of it,' said Lucy, with a piteous face.

'Why not, love?'

'Oh, for ever so many reasons. He says you are wild.'

'Because I was weak enough to let myself be ploughed for smalls. That was boating, and not dissipation, my pet. I never was gated in my life, and I don't owe sixpence in Oxford. Besides which, I am working like a nigger at this present time.'

'Oh, Waller, when you waste whole afternoons talking to me!'

'Only necessary relaxation, dearest. I should very soon be in a lunatic asylum if I stuck to my books all day.'

Their fool's paradise had not lasted long before

Samuel Grynde got to know of those meetings by the broken-down fence, and that his daughter's heart had been handed across that dilapidated boundary, together with the botanical specimens.

He was calm in the greatness of his anger.

'This is an outrage I was not prepared for,' he remarked to his contrite and weeping child, 'although your plebeian manners and slovenly habits have made your life one continued affront to me. I beg that you will consider yourself a prisoner in the house, except when your elder sisters are good enough to allow you to accompany them on their constitutional walks.'

Lucy gave a shuddering sob. If there was one thing she detested more than another, it was these constitutional walks. Three miles out and three miles home on the level high road to Springfield, with no landscape save an arable flat, bounded by an occasional stunted hedgerow. Her own rambles were sweet to her—unmeasured wanderings in Cadbury Park, or in the woods beyond the park, with her small brothers, nutting, blackberrying, spoiling her clothes, and cultivating a complexion that rivalled

the roses and lilies in the old cottage garden. But these six miles by the milestones were an abomination to her.

All this happened during what Waller Carlyon called the long vac. It was the very end of the summer, and a glorious summer, the land overflowing with fertility, and the drainage of Cadbury not quite answering the expectations of its projectors. August was in its prime, and people had almost forgotten the sensation of a wet day.

'It's a very miserable summer,' complained Lucy, as she sat at her plain sewing—plain sewing was one of the accomplishments Samuel Grynde insisted on for his patent young woman—in the square, bare, sunny breakfast parlour at the Hollies. 'I wish it would rain torrents, or thunder, or lighten, or do anything instead of this perpetual broil, broil, broil.'

Waller Carlyon, cut off from that pleasant idlesse by the old fence, went harder than ever at his books, promising his mother that all should be well at the next examination; and the widow, who believed in him as a future Lord Chancellor, blessed him for his goodness and industry, and implored him

to do justice to his splendid talents, which must have been designed by Providence to raise him to a pinnacle.

'Well, mother, I'll do what I can to swarm up the pinnacle,' answered the youth, in his sanguine style, 'or, at any rate, to get a fellowship before I'm thirty, so that I may be a help and not a burden to you.'

'Ah, Waller,' sighed his mother, 'I'm not thinking of money. I want you to be distinguished. Who knows whether you mayn't be rich some day, independent of your own efforts. Sir Luke Cadbury——'

'Put Sir Luke and his fortune out of your mind, mother. Old Sandy Stork is a nearer relation than you or I; and, depend upon it, if ever Sir Luke comes back to Cadbury our next-door neighbour will wind round him like a serpent, lubricate him with soft sawder, and swallow him bodily, as a cobra swallows a rabbit.'

'Who knows?' said Mrs. Carlyon, with smiling significance.

She was an easy-tempered lady, and always made the best of the present, and hoped a great deal

from the future. The idea that Sir Luke Cadbury might leave some of his money to her son had been the foundation of many an air-built castle. Waller would never admit that such a thing was likely.

'I dare say Sir Luke is a fiery-tempered old savage, and that if he comes home I shall hate him,' he used to say.

It was useless to think of stopping indoors in such an August as this, so, when the garden ceased to be a paradise, Waller took Thucydides and his lexicon under his arm, and went into Cadbury Park. It was the loveliest place for a summer ramble. Neglect had beautified it. Instead of the well-kept orderly fairness of a prosperous gentleman's domain, it had the wild loveliness of untrodden woods. A painter would have revelled in such a wilderness. Oaks and beeches a thousand years old, bramble and fern that had flourished undisturbed for half a century, glimpses of a silvery trout stream that meandered in and out, and twined itself about the place as if it loved those shadowy deeps of foliage.

Here, on the margin of this silvern brook, Waller

used to sit for hours, trying to grasp the spirit of the great historian as well as the letter; he used to sit and pore over the page, till it seemed to him that all the troubles of the Peloponnesian War were upon his shoulders.

He was getting rather sleepy over his book one particularly sultry afternoon, when he was startled from his drowsiness by a strident voice near at hand—a voice that had an overbearing and singularly caddish tone, he thought, sadly out of harmony with those tranquil woods.

'Too much timber,' said the voice; 'we must lay about with us the axe here, Blagrove.'

Another voice, very mild this one, murmured acquiescence.

'And we must have the roof off, Blagrove, and rebuild the stables. I never saw such a ramshackle old barrack. By Jove, sir, I wonder how my father tolerated it. But, to be sure, he hadn't a sixpence of ready money to lay out, poor old beggar. *He* couldn't write his cheque for fifty thousand, and feel none the poorer for it, as some people we know could, eh, Blagrove?'

'By the beard of the thunderer,' ejaculated Waller, 'this must be Sir Luke.'

The voices were coming nearer to him, and the owners thereof now came in full view, on the opposite bank of the narrow stream.

The man with the big voice was portly and pompous. He had a rubicund nose, a keen gray eye, a coarse stubble of grey hair, and a fierce gray whisker. He carried his hat in his hand, and puffed and snorted a good deal, as if oppressed with the heat.

His companion was a small dark man, with an intelligent eye and a pleasant mouth—a mouth with a touch of good-humoured irony in its expression. He was about the same age as the stout man, his hair and beard iron-gray. He was rather shabbily dressed, and looked like a clerk, humble companion, or toady, Waller thought.

'Hi, you sir!' cried the big man. 'Do you know this place?'

'Pretty well,' answered Waller, still seated on the bank.

'Then you ought to know that you're trespassing. What's the use of people going to the expense of

putting up boards, telling you that trespassers will be prosecuted, if you go on trespassing all the same?'

'I've been in the habit of using this park for the last ten years, and have never been told I was a trespasser till to-day,' said Waller.

'Nonsense! Don't the boards tell you so as plain as a pikestaff, if you can read?'

'Farmer Gibbs never told me so, and, as he rents the land, he has the best right to object to me.'

'Come, I say, young man, don't you be contumacious. You are trespassing upon my land, sir—my land. Do you understand that? I come home here after forty years' absence, and the first object I encounter is a trespasser. Pleasant state of things, sir, that, for a man who has made his fortune by the sweat of his brow on the other side of the world. Pleasant to come home and find his patrimonial acres made free with by a trespasser.'

'Make your mind easy, Sir Luke. I shan't intrude again.'

'Oh, you know me, do you?'

'Only by repute, sir, though I have the honour to be a distant relation of yours.'

'Distant relation. Yes, I expect I shall have distant relations cropping up at every hand's turn. And pray who may you be?'

'My name is Waller Carlyon.'

'Oh,' said Sir Luke. He surveyed Waller deliberately from head to foot, and then turned to his humble friend. 'Blagrove, you've a better memory than I have, and you've heard me talk about my family times and often. What relation is Waller Carlyon to me?'

'Third cousin,' answered Blagrove. 'Your father's first cousin, Sybilla Cadbury, married Squire Carlyon of Denzil Place, and this young man is their grandson.'

'Oh,' said Sir Luke, 'that's uncommonly distant. I can hardly be expected to recognise that as a claim, can I, Blagrove? Now look here, Mr. Waller——'

But Waller had gathered up his books and was gone.

'Horrid old cad,' he said to himself as he went across the park. 'I dare say I've made an end of *my* chances in that direction; but I couldn't cringe

to such an old savage as that for the chance of inheriting a million.'

Cadbury was convulsed. Sir Luke's return was the grandest event that had happened since the opening of the loop line from Springfield. Cadbury was on the tiptoe of expectancy. What was Sir Luke going to do? Would he rebuild the old Hall? To whom would he leave his money? Would Mr. Grynde, who had made a boast of his cousinship, be received into the great man's favour? Cadbury awaited the answer to these queries, breathless with curiosity and wonder.

Cadbury's doubts upon two points were speedily set at rest. Sir Luke did not rebuild the old Hall; he only restored it to its original solidity and splendour. And Sir Luke took Samuel Grynde to his bosom.

Mr. Grynde, spare of figure, and without an ounce of superfluous flesh about him, seemed bodily to expand after Sir Luke's return. He had always walked the streets of Cadbury as if the place belonged to him; but he contrived to impart increased arrogance to his walk — a superlative dignity to his figure—after Sir Luke's return.

He was at Sir Luke's right hand throughout the restoration of the Hall, which occupied all the autumn, and was more than ever stork-like in his motions and attitudes. He dipped his beak into every drain, climbed ladders upon perpetual journeys of inspection, peered into every gutter, and was continually whitening his coat with lime. He knew a good deal about building, and contrived to make the lives of bricklayers and other mechanics a burden to them, and to worry the architect into a low fever.

'I can save you hundreds, Sir Luke, *hundreds*,' he used to say. 'I know these fellows and the tricks they are up to.—Hi, you sir, what is that timber you are putting in? Let me see. if you please. Do you call this free from sap? And those wall posts, are they stop chamfered, sir? Let there be no shirking here.'

This devotion was all the more creditable to Mr. Grynde as Sir Luke was by no means an agreeable person to serve. He was choleric, and in his choler made no distinction of persons. He would swear at his toady and dependant Jack Blagrove, and at Samuel Grynde, indifferently. He had an unpleasant

way of telling people that they were fools, idiots, ignoramuses. He sent his dear Samuel on messages. He rounded on his dear Samuel to the architect, and let that gentleman know Mr. Grynde's very low estimate of his professional skill. He was a glutton and a gourmand, and made himself odious at dinner-time by quarrelling with the goods the gods had provided, and swearing at his cook. He was perpetually bragging about his wonderful career, and railing at the worn-out county families, which, he asserted, were lapsing to decay, slipping from stagnant respectability into absolute ruin, for want of the trader's energy and the trader's success.

'Suppose I had stayed at home, sir, and played the fine gentleman, just because I had a handle to my name, and let the mortgagees foreclose? where would Cadbury Hall have been now, I should like to know?'

'Cadbury itself would be the poorer by one of the noblest examples ever offered to mankind,' exclaimed Mr. Grynde, feeling that his reply was at once appropriate and eloquent.

'Ah,' grunted Sir Luke, 'I wasn't afraid of trade

because I was born in the purple. I dropped the handle to my name, and went in for wool, sir, and wool brought me through. Bring up your children to trade, Grynde, if you want 'em to be great men. Where would your Peels and your Gladstones be if they hadn't got trade at the back of 'em? That's the backbone, sir!'

Mr. Grynde winced. With the pride of a man whose forefathers had been commercial, he aspired to make his sons professional, to see their names by and by adorned with Q.C., or supported by the prefix of Reverend. His sons, still in the hobbledehoy stage, were being ground into parsons and barristers, but had not yet got beyond a preliminary course of Æsop and Ovid.

'Trade is a fine thing,' he exclaimed gushingly. 'Trade is the quicksilver in the veins of society, which keeps all things moving. But, alas! I fear my poor boys lack that mental force needful to the trader. They have not the scope, the width, the breadth, the largeness of mind——'

Here Mr. Grynde waved his arms like a thrashing machine.

'Humph!' muttered Sir Luke, 'that means to say

you're going to make them respectable paupers in the learned professions. I'm sorry for 'em.—Blagrove, my camp-stool——'

'Mr. Blagrove, the camp-stool,' repeated Mr. Grynde in a tone just a little more arbitrary than that of the tyrant himself.

Poor John Blagrove had rather a bad time of it that autumn. His patron was hard upon him always, but Samuel Grynde was harder. He pointed every joke of Sir Luke's against his toady by the frankness of his hilarity. If Mr. Blagrove had been a butt before, he was twice a butt now. Samuel Grynde never spared him.

'There doesn't seem to be much sympathy between you and me, Mr. Grynde,' the humble companion said once in meek remonstrance.

'Candidly, my good friend, there is none,' answered Mr. Grynde; 'I hate parasites.'

'And yet we both belong to the same family,' said Blagrove. 'You're much the sturdier plant, I admit; but we hang on the same tree.'

'What, sir, you presume to compare me, Samuel Grynde of the Hollies, a man of independent property,

a man of illimitable influence in this parish, with your beggarly self?'

'I don't compare our persons or our social status, sir. I only say that our aims tend in one direction. You intend to be enriched by Sir Luke. I hope to be left a small competence by the same benefactor.'

'Oh, you do, do you, sir? You have the audacity to own that you anticipate a competence? A cool five thousand or so in the Three per Cents., I suppose, bringing you in something like two hundred a year?'

'I have served Sir Luke faithfully, and served him long.'

'And have been paid for your services, I'll warrant me. I am of Sir Luke's own flesh and blood, Mr. Blagrove; his first cousin, sir; couldn't be nearer unless I was his brother. What have you to say against that, sir?'

'Nothing,' answered Blagrve, with a touch of that manhood which was not quite extinct in him, 'except that Sir Luke might have had a more generous-minded cousin.'

The reparations and restorations at Cadbury Hall were completed just before Christmas, and a noble

mansion the old house looked in its prosperity. Shining oak panelling, rich but sombre Turkey and Persian carpets, good old furniture, renovated, but in no case modernized. Despite his ingrained snobbishness, Sir Luke had shown excellent taste in all details, most of all in resisting Mr. Grynde's advice, and suffering himself to be guided by his toady Blagrove, who had a wonderful appreciation of the beautiful and the harmonious.

Christmas was to be a grand time at the Hall, for Sir Luke had taken it into his head to gather all his relations round him at that festive period. He would have them all in the house, he declared, from Christmas Eve till Twelfth-night.

'I want them all about me,' he said; 'I want to know of what stuff they're made of. They're pretty sure to turn themselves inside out in a fortnight. Let 'em all come. There are rooms enough for the whole biling.'

'Whole biling!' echoed Samuel, admiringly. 'That's what I call our racy English humour.'

Now this Christmastide hospitality was all very

well, as regarded the Grynde tribe; but the worthy Samuel distinctly objected to Waller Carlyon and his mother—that weak-minded widow who insisted upon being alive and cheerful when her gray hairs ought to have been brought down in sorrow to the grave by her son's ill conduct.

Upon this point, however, Sir Luke was inflexible. 'Pig-headed,' Mr. Grynde called him inwardly.

'That Carlyon fellow is an insolent blackguard,' said the baronet; 'but I'll have him here all the same, and let him turn himself inside out.'

On this Mr. Grynde tried to make excuses for his daughter Lucy, whose peace of mind and ultimate destiny would be alike jeopardized by her being thrown into Waller Carlyon's society for a fortnight on end.

But here again Sir Luke's pig-headedness exhibited itself.

'If Lucy doesn't come, I won't have any of your brood,' replied the baronet, savagely.

So the brood came, and Lucy among them. Poor Lucy was not elated at the idea of spending a fortnight at the great house, where she would doubtless

outrage those proprieties with which Mr. Grynde surrounded and fenced himself in, as with a particularly spiky *chevaux de frise*. Many a wound had Lucy given herself against those spikes.

No one told her that Waller was to be at the Hall, and it was a tremendous surprise to her when that young gentleman appeared at the great door and handed her out of the fly, in which she arrived with her sisters, at about four o'clock in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, light snow flakes sprinkling them as they alighted. 'Capital Christmas weather!' as Waller remarked, cheerily. The two elder girls, Caroline and Amelia, gave him only a distant bow in return for his civility; but he contrived to get hold of Lucy's hand and keep it for ever so long, while the bags and portmanteau were being carried in, the young ladies having brought all their fine raiment for the subjugation of 'dear uncle Luke.'

'Come, Lucy,' cried Caroline severely, directly her attention was withdrawn from her bonnet-boxes; and Lucy was led off like a state prisoner to the bed-chamber which Mr. Grynde had contrived to secure for her—a room inside her sister's apartment—a

funny old room, small, low, and with three closets in it, so that there was more closet door than wall-paper. There was a neat little brass bedstead, and a muslin-draped toilet table, with a lot of little Japanese boxes for pins, rings, and such small gear, and Lucy exclaimed that it was 'a duck of a room.'

'I wouldn't be so gushing if I were you, Lucy,' remarked Amelia; 'it's extremely vulgar. You know how papa admires repose of manner.'

Sir Luke received his young relations with a kind of bearish good-nature—loud, gruff and rough. The dinner was a profuse and splendid banquet, and poor little Lucy, who sat next her father and remote from Waller, felt that the whole thing was an ordeal. She would have been altogether miserable if it had not been for Mr. Blagrove, who sat on her left hand and talked to her a good deal, telling her about his Australian experiences in a very pleasant way. She thought him quite the nicest old gentleman she had ever met, and was absolutely enjoying herself, when her father's heavy boot came down savagely upon her poor little satin shoe.

'Oh!' she cried.

'What do you mean by encouraging that old sycophant?' whispered Mr. Grynde in Lucy's affrighted ear. 'Am I for ever to be outraged by your vulgar instincts?'

After this Lucy's answers grew faltering and embarrassed. She was too tender-hearted willingly to let Mr. Blagrove see that she had been reproved for talking to him; but there was a palpable change in her manner, and the old man soon lapsed into silence.

'What has Mr. Blagrove done, papa, that I mustn't be friendly with him?' Lucy asked later in the evening, when she found herself next her father for a minute.

'What has he done? Have you no sense? Are you utterly devoid of discrimination? Don't you understand that this old man is a sordid flatterer, who hopes by licking the dust under Sir Luke's feet to ingratiate himself into my cousin's favour, and succeed to some portion of—if not all—his money?'

'But don't you do the same, papa? I don't mean lick the dust; but don't you hope to succeed to Sir Luke's fortune?'

'Don't presume to address another word to me, girl,' exclaimed Mr. Grynde, beside himself. 'You're a born idiot, and I think you were created to annoy me. Look at your sisters.'

He pointed to those young ladies, who at this moment offered a back view to their admirers. They had just seated themselves at the piano to execute their grand duet, 'The Waking of the Lion.' There was quite a military precision in their attitudes—elbows, shoulders, chignons at exactly the same angles.

'Look at your sisters, and blush,' whispered Mr. Grynde to poor Lucy. 'Blush as you reflect how the advantages by which they have profited have been thrown away upon you.'

Lucy had a fine ear for music, but had never been able to overcome the mechanical difficulties of that art so as to excel in the performance of showy fantasias, and the only kind of music which impressed Mr. Grynde was music of the skyrocket school.

The lion growled—the lion bellowed—the lion stretched himself—shook himself—exploded into savage roars, as the Miss Gryndes scampered up and down the keys at a lightning pace, or threw all the

power of their elbows into a volley of prodigious chords, which exploded in a sudden and alarming manner like musical torpedoes. Samuel hovered stork-like over the new grand piano, and rubbed his hands complacently, glancing round the assembly occasionally, as much as to say, 'This is my work. *I* taught them—or paid for their tuition, which is much the same thing.'

Sir Luke walked up and down the drawing-room throughout that performance, looking rather like a newly awakened lion himself. When it was all over he wiped his perspiring forehead with his Mandarin yellow bandanna, and exclaimed,—

'What an infernal row!'

Mr. Grynde's jaw dropped as he stared aghast at his kinsman.

'Will somebody play, "The Last Rose of Summer," or "Wapping Old Stairs"?' cried the baronet. 'That's the sort of music I like.'

'Caroline! "Wapping Old Stairs" immediately!' said Mr. Grynde, smiling amiably.

'I am sorry to say I have not that melody amongst my music, papa,' replied his dutiful eldest.

'Amelia, then.'

'Nor I, papa.'

'Nonsense! what do you want with music to play a simple air like that?'

'We do not play by ear, papa,' replied Caroline and Amelia simultaneously, as if that incapacity were rather a virtue than a defect.

'Lucy does,' cried Andrew, the youngest boy. 'Lucy can play anything she has once heard.'

'Then let Lucy play as many good old tunes as she can remember,' commanded Sir Luke.

Lucy, blushing to the roots of her hair, took her seat at the piano. Her fingers faltered a little just at first, but very soon the delight of touching that deep-toned Broadwood overcame every other feeling, and she breathed her pure young soul into the familiar old melodies. 'Wapping Old Stairs,' 'The Last Rose of Summer,' 'My lodging is on the cold ground,' 'Auld Lang Syne,' 'Robin Adair,' 'Love's Young Dream' followed, like the beads of a necklace, strung together with tender untaught modulations.

It was 'Love's Young Dream' with which the girl finished, and there was a young Oxonian in the corner

by the wide old hearth whose eyes were wet with tears.

When Lucy rose, trembling a little at the silence her melody had made, Sir Luke marched straight to the piano and gave her a sounding kiss.

'Thank you, my dear,' he said; 'that's what I call music.'

Caroline and Amelia were rather short in their tempers that night at hair-brushing time, and Lucy was glad to have her funny little cupboardy room all to herself.

Christmas Day was very much like Christmas Eve, except that everybody went to church in the morning, and that the afternoon was devoted to a general exploration of the house. The walk to and from church, and the perambulation of the spacious old house, with its various corridors and darksome lobbies, gave Waller and Lucy several opportunities for a *tête-à-tête*, in spite of the Miss Gryndes' vigilance.

'Now,' exclaimed the stentorian voice of Sir Luke at dessert, 'I want you young people to have an old-fashioned Christmas evening—blindman's buff,

forfeits, puss-in-the-corner, acted charades, kissing under the mistletoe, and lots of it.'

'Vulgar old barbarian,' said Samuel Grynde inwardly; but in his outward and audible voice he cried, 'Dear Sir Luke, how your expansive nature delights in the pleasure of your youthful guests!'

'I should like to see some of 'em rather more youthful,' replied Sir Luke; 'those sons of yours look as if they were cased in whalebone from top to toe. I never saw such young prigs.'

'They have been carefully educated, I admit,' murmured Mr. Grynde.

'Carefully educated, sir! They've been drilled into anatomies!' cried Sir Luke. 'I should like to see them unbend, if it's in 'em to do it.'

Anxious to gratify his wealthy cousin, Mr. Grynde got near his sons, one by one, as the evening progressed, and whispered into their ears,—

'Be lively, sir, can't you? jump, jig, be boy-like, vivacious. Give loose to your animal spirits, boy.'

But the animal spirit of Mr. Grynde's sons had been flat-ironed out of them, or was at best a very tame animal. They went about the old oak-panelled

hall on tiptoe in the game of blindman's buff, grinning with a stereotyped grin, and looking as dapper and as *blasé* as Government clerks at a second-rate evening party.

Lucy—that perpetual offender against propriety—was the sole member of the Grynde family whose liveliness had not been brayed out of her in the paternal mortar. She skipped, she danced, she gave loose to girlhood's long pent-up mirth; she was always catching Waller Carlyon, or being caught by him. It was dreadful to see her going on so, her sisters remarked, with long faces.

But their remonstrances would have been useless, for Lucy was the heroine of the evening. Sir Luke took her under his wing, praised her pretty face, her flowing hair, her light step, her silver laugh, her sweet touch on the piano, by-and-by, when they had magic music, and Lucy played for them, interweaving a new garland of old melodies, from 'Hope told a flattering tale' to 'Cherry Ripe.' Yet this girl, out of very perversity, seemed to take more interest in that old toady John Blagrove's conversation than in Sir Luke's outspoken compliments. Mr. Blagrove sat by

the piano, and she talked to him softly while she played. He was very fond of music, he told her; and she felt that it was a real affection, and that the good old melodies went straight from her heart to his. It was quite the happiest evening Lucy had ever spent in her life, so different from Christmas evenings at the Hollies, which had been respectable and ceremonial occasions, enlivened with sacred music, and a solemn rubber for the elders. The old hall was only lighted by the great roaring yule log, which left shadowy corners unilluminated; and somehow, after the music, Waller and Lucy were always getting into these shadowy corners, and that dear old Mr. Blagrove made it his business to keep off intruders from these dusky retreats. He had taken the lovers under his protection, though they hardly knew it as yet.

Poor Waller was very far gone that evening, and felt it his bounden duty to make another appeal to Mr. Grynde next morning. That gentleman referred him to Sir Luke.

'You are apprised of *my* sentiments upon this subject, Mr. Carlyon,' he said. 'They are not likely

to undergo modification; but Sir Luke is my first cousin, the next best thing to being my brother, and he has in a manner taken my humble destiny and that of my children under his wing. If Sir Luke considers you a fitting match for my daughter Lucy, I withdraw my objections, and lay down my personal opinion as a sacrifice to that superior mind.'

'Sir Luke is in the library,' said Waller; 'will you say as much to him, and without delay?'

Mr. Grynde assented, and they went together to the library, where Sir Luke was lounging luxuriously in an arm-chair before the fire, reading yesterday's *Times*, while his humble companion, John Blagrove, wrote letters at a table by the window. A hardy man, Mr. Blagrove, with no self-indulgent habits.

'May I ask for a few words with you in private, Sir Luke?' said Waller.

'Talk away, sir, we are as much in private as we need be,' answered the baronet, curtly; 'Blagrove doesn't count.'

Waller urged his pretensions to Lucy's hand; he spoke of their mutual attachment, his hopes for the future—spoke with manliness and modesty.

Sir Luke flew in a passion.

'What, sir,' he cried, 'you come into my house only to seduce my favourite cousin's affections! You make love to her under my nose in a sneaking underhand way!'

'No, Sir Luke; Lucy and I came to an understanding last summer, and Mr. Grynde knew all about it.'

'Knew and disapproved, sir—disapproved, as you are aware, Mr. Carlyon; but I was willing to submit myself to Sir Luke—I was willing to be overruled by his superior judgment.'

'No fear of my overruling you, sir!' exclaimed Sir Luke. 'Marry my cousin to a jackanapes, who thinks he is going to set up housekeeping on a little Greek and Latin, and sponge upon me for the rest.'

This was unbearable. Waller lost his temper, and answered Sir Luke roundly. The baronet blustered and swore, and it ended in Waller going to his mother to tell her to pack her trunk, while he went down to the 'White Lion' to order a fly.

Mrs. Carlyon shed tears, and bewailed her adverse fate. 'After our spending such a happy evening and

all,' she lamented. 'I am sure I thought you had made such a favourable impression on Sir Luke.'

'His hide is too thick to be impressed, mother, except by a sledge-hammer. Silly old lady, you're crying over your best cap and taking the starch out. Don't be downhearted, mother. You know I never counted on the old man's favour.'

'Perhaps not, Waller,' answered the widow piteously, 'but I did.'

Waller got the fly and went off in sullen state with his mother, feeing the servants handsomely, but taking leave of no one. The news of his departure got about very soon, however, and Lucy came down to luncheon with red eyelids and without any appetite.

Her father demanded a private interview with her that afternoon, and called upon her solemnly to renounce that Oxonian reprobate Waller Carlyon. She was to pledge herself there and then to hold no further communication with him, never to speak to him, look at him, or even think of him again. Goaded thus, poor Lucy plucked up a spirit. Perhaps it was the high living at Cadbury Hall which made her so bold.

'No, papa,' she said, with gentle firmness. 'This is a question that concerns all my future life, and I cannot give way until I have reason to think myself wrong. My youth has not been particularly happy since poor mamma died. You and I have not seemed to understand each other very well; and I cannot renounce the hope of happiness all at once, because you tell me to do so.'

Samuel Grynde broke out furiously at this defiance. The waking of the lion was nothing to him; he quoted King Lear, and declared that such ingratitude as this was sharper than a serpent's tooth; and then he ordered Lucy off to her room, there to remain in durance till the end of the visit. Her sisters would take care of her, Mr. Grynde added, significantly.

This seemed an arbitrary proceeding on a father's part; but the fact is, Mr. Grynde was beginning to feel just a little jealous of his youngest daughter. Sir Luke had bestowed a degree of notice upon Lucy which, although flattering to Samuel Grynde's pride as a parent, was alarming to his self-interest as a legatee. Money left to Lucy, for her separate

use and maintenance, would be almost as much alienated from Lucy's father as if left to a stranger. She was just of age too; there would be no need of guardianship or trusteeship. If Sir Luke were to die to-morrow, she would pass at once into possession of any fortune he might leave her, and would doubtless bestow it on that reprobate Waller Carlyon. Sir Luke was pig-headed, self-willed, and illogical enough to be capable of leaving his entire fortune to Lucy if it pleased his fancy to do so.

'He hasn't the faintest sense of justice,' Mr. Grynde told himself; 'he must be ruled by a stronger mind than his own, and that pert chit of mine must be kept out of his way.'

So Lucy was relegated to the little cupboardy room inside the spacious bedchamber occupied by her sisters, and Sir Luke was told that she was suffering from acute neuralgia.

It was curious what a blank was made in the circle that evening by the absence of Waller and Lucy. All the Christmastide mirth was gone. Caroline and Amelia played their finest pieces, and sang the last fashionable Italian songs about nothing particular,

but gloom hung over the assembly as a curtain. Sir Luke fell asleep in his big chair by the fire; John Blagrove stole out of the room; the four Grynde boys played whist with the air of middle-aged fogies at the Cavendish Club; Mr. Grynde felt that things were going badly.

Lucy cried herself to sleep before it was dark, and woke to find the cold winter moon shining upon her white bed; a very awful-looking moon it seemed to her in the stillness of her chamber. She was a long way from all the sitting-rooms, quite at the end of a corridor, and she felt as if she were an inmate of some lonely tower in a great feudal castle. She began to be rather hungry too. One of the maids had brought a tray with chicken and other daintinesses at dinner-time, but Lucy had been too fast asleep just then to hear the knock at the door.

She struck a match and lighted the wax candles on the dressing-table, which made things a little better, but hunger still prevailed. She had been too nervous to eat anything at breakfast that morning, knowing that Waller was going to speak to her

father, and now it was ten o'clock, and she had been fasting all day.

'Oh dear,' said Lucy, 'how I should like a biscuit, a common hard biscuit even!'

She had hardly breathed this desire when she heard a curious sound in one of the cupboards.

'Goodness!' she screamed, 'it is a rat. I never can stay in this room if there are rats;' and she jumped on the bed to escape the horrid intruder.

Happily this was no rat, for a voice in the cupboard said gently, 'May I come in for a few minutes, Miss Lucy?'

It was poor trodden-upon Mr. Blagrove.

'Oh yes,' cried Lucy, 'please come in. I thought you were a rat.'

A key turned in a lock, and the cupboard door opened to admit Mr. Blagrove.

'You haven't been in that cupboard all day?' asked Lucy.

'No, my dear. This cupboard has two doors, as you may see if you look inside, the inner one opening on the servants' staircase at the east end of the

house. You may often find such closets in old houses. I don't think your papa knows of this.'

'I'm sure he doesn't,' said Lucy.

'Well, my poor child, how's the neuralgia?'

'Whose neuralgia?' asked Lucy; 'I never had neuralgia in my life.'

'Indeed! Then why are you up here?'

Lucy told him her troubles, artlessly as a child.

'Ah, I thought how the land lay. And so you two children are very fond of each other?'

'We adore each other.'

'And you think Waller would make you a good husband?'

'How could he be anything else? He is so good, so clever, such an affectionate son, so honourable, so industrious.'

'What a string of virtues! Well, my dear, without being quite so enthusiastic as you, I really believe he is a good honest-hearted young fellow. I only wish I could help you.'

'I wish you could,' said Lucy. 'I took to you from the very first, Mr. Blagrove; you made me feel more at my ease somehow, and when I saw how

rude the others were to you—except Waller and his mother, of course—I liked you all the more. I thought you were an outrage, like me.'

'An outrage?' inquired Mr. Blagrove.

'Yes. Papa always says I am an outrage against his sense of propriety.'

'How old are you, Lucy?'

'Twenty-one last November.'

'And you hardly look nineteen. And how old is Mr. Carlyon?'

'Twenty-one last May.'

'Humph,' muttered John Blagrove. 'If he were to elope with you it wouldn't be abduction. Poor little girl! I'm sorry I'm such a useless, dependent creature. Is there any small way now in which I could be of service?'

'Oh yes,' cried Lucy, eagerly; 'if you'd be so very kind as to get me something to eat; I'm positively famishing.'

'Famishing! Why, didn't you eat that wing of a chicken I sent you, with a mince pie to follow?'

'No, indeed; no one has brought me anything.'

John Blagrove opened Lucy's door, and looked

outside. There was the tray just as the maid had left it, on a table in the next room—a silver cover over the plate of chicken, which was flanked by a pint of champagne, the cork drawn, and the wine rather flat by this time.

Lucy was delighted to find she had not been forgotten.

'You dear, good soul,' she exclaimed, 'how sweet of you to think of me when I was in disgrace!'

'Neuralgia,' said Mr. Blagrove.

'No, sir, disobedience; and you must have known it.'

John Blagrove put the tray on a little table by the fire, which he had brightened up into a blaze. He and Lucy sat opposite each other, and hobnobbed with the champagne and shared the mince pie. It was quite a merry little *tête-à-tête* supper. Mr. Blagrove had locked the door, to make sure against interruption.

'Now, Lucy,' he said, 'I am not going to have you shut up in this room much longer. If your father doesn't let you out in the course of to-morrow I shall let you out the morning after. Let me see,

this is Thursday. Put on your best frock and your prettiest bonnet at nine o'clock on Saturday morning, while they all are at breakfast downstairs, and hold yourself in readiness to take a walk with me.'

'But what will papa say? He will never forgive me.'

'Nonsense, child! I think I know how to manage Mr. Grynde, with Sir Luke at my back. I can do anything with Sir Luke, you know.'

'Can you?' asked Lucy, wonderingly. 'I shouldn't have thought it; he seems to snub you so.'

'Only manner, my dear. But I must be off, or we shall have your sisters here, and then you'll get into trouble.'

So Mr. Blagrove gave Lucy a paternal kiss on her pretty white forehead, and let himself out by that mysterious old cupboard in which she had suspected rats.

The next day seemed very long to Lucy, though it was one of the shortest in the year. Her sisters had supplied her with a strip of embroidery to be worked, and a very dull book, but neither work nor

book could beguile her thoughts from the one subject of wonder that occupied her mind. What did Mr. Blagrove intend by such an audacious step as he had talked about last night? and how would he succeed in pacifying her father? Her meals were brought her quite regularly to-day, but wonder had taken away her appetite.

She obeyed her old friend implicitly, however, next morning, and was arrayed in her pretty dove-coloured silk dress, her black velvet jacket, and brown straw bonnet lined with sky-blue, by the time the great breakfast-bell rang.

She was putting on her gloves—a new pair to match her dress—when John Blagrove knocked at the closet door.

'Come in,' cried she.

'Ready, I see,' said he, 'and looking your prettiest. What's the day of the month?'

'What a funny question!' said Lucy; 'why, the 28th of December, to be sure.'

'That's a date which you must remember all your life, little one,' said the old man. 'Come along.'

He took her hand, and led her down a darkish

and narrowish stair till they came to a stone lobby that opened into the stable-yard. Grooms were hissing ferociously at their horses, and coachmen were squirting water at carriage wheels, but no one noticed Lucy and her companion. They went from the stable-yard to the park, and across the park, in the clear winter morning. The grass was frosted, and glittered in the sunshine.

'I am glad the sun shines, Lucy, for your sake,' said Mr. Blagrove. This remark, following on that about the date, seemed so odd that Lucy began to fear her old friend was not quite right in his head. A dear, good, pleasant old gentleman, but a little childish at times, perhaps.

They walked on till they came to the park gates, where there was actually a carriage waiting for them, Sir Luke's family coach, and into this they got. It drove them to the door of the old parish church.

'Is it a saint's day?' asked Lucy.

Mr. Blagrove answered never a word, but drew her little hand through his arm, and led her into the church. Just then the organ began to play a lively

march of Mendelssohn's; and, gracious! here was Waller Carlyon coming down the aisle, with his mother on his arm, and Mrs. Carlyon had her best gown on, the lavender moire she wore at all the Cadbury parties.

'Now, Lucy, you are my little girl to-day, and you are going to be married,' said Mr. Blagrove.

'Oh!' cried Lucy, 'I couldn't possibly—I couldn't fly in papa's face like this. He'd never forgive me'

'Yes, my dear, he would. He'll forgive you when he knows that I've adopted you, and that I can twist Sir Luke round my finger.'

Waller offered Lucy his arm now, and somehow she took it without quite knowing what she was doing, and they went up to the altar.

The good old vicar came out of the vestry, and the marriage service began, Lucy trembling very much; but when it came to her turn for responding, she spoke out more boldly than could have been expected. That glad young soul of hers burst its bonds of discipline just then, and she forgot all about her father's anger.

After they had all signed their names in the

vestry, Mr. Blagrove asked permission to put a ring over the symbolic circlet which Waller had just placed on Lucy's finger, and he slipped on a diamond half-hoop, whose lustre made the spectators wink, so brilliant were the big white stones in the morning sunshine. Such a present could hardly have been expected from a poor dependent like Mr. Blagrove, and Lucy wondered more and more.

And now the organ burst out again with Mendelssohn—the 'Wedding March' this time—and to the sound of that pompous music they walked down the aisle, and to the door where Sir Luke's coach was waiting for them.

They all four got into the carriage and drove back to Cadbury Hall—yes, entered audaciously by the park gates, and drove boldly up to the great Doric door. Everybody had gone mad, Lucy thought: yet she trembled no longer: she was no longer afraid of her father's wrath. She sat by her husband's side, and felt that safety and protection were there.

'Where is Sir Luke?' asked Mr. Blagrove as they went in.

'In the library, sir, with Mr. Grynde.'

'Come this way, then,' said Sir Luke's humble follower; and Lucy, Waller, and Mrs. Carlyon accompanied him to the sombre old room, with its long narrow windows and high walls lined with brown-backed books.

Sir Luke sat in his big arm-chair. Mr. Grynde stood in his favourite attitude in front of the fire, his coat tails over his arms. He faced the door as Lucy and her companions entered.

'Merciful powers! what does this mean?' he cried. 'Lucy, I thought I had desired you to keep your chamber.—Young man,' to Waller, 'I think that Sir Luke and I made our views pretty clear to you the day before yesterday.'

'Happily for me, sir, I had a friend of another way of thinking,' answered Waller, with respectful boldness; 'and, with his aid, I have ventured to take the law into my own hands. Lucy is of age and her own mistress, and within the last half-hour she has become my wife. She need be not the less your dutiful daughter on that account.'

Lucy was on her knees at her father's feet.

'"Blow, blow, thou wintry wind,
Thou art not so unkind,"

as this kind of thing,' cried Mr. Grynde, in a paroxysm of indignation. 'Go away, you base, undutiful child. Go and be a pauper with the pauper you have chosen for your husband. I renounce you!'

'And I adopt her,' said Mr. Blagrove, taking the weeping girl to his breast. 'I have given her away this morning; but I mean to keep her all the days of my life, and I shall leave her and her husband master and mistress of Cadbury Hall.'

'*You!*' cried Samuel Grynde. 'What have you got to do with it?'

'Only this much,' answered the old man, quietly: 'I am Sir Luke Cadbury. When I came home from Australia after forty years' exile, it was suggested to me by my good friend and chief clerk here, John Blagrove,' pointing to the stout gentleman in the arm-chair, 'that, as a wealthy and childless man, I was likely to be the cause of much meanness and mercenary feeling in my next of kin, the object of a great deal of flattery and sycophancy, and that

I should hardly succeed in seeing my next of kin in their true colours, so thick would be the coat of varnish they would put on to dazzle and deceive me. Out of this suggestion grew the idea that I, Luke Cadbury, should assume the person of my clerk and dependant John Blagrove, making that personification a great deal more subservient and dependent than the real Jack Blagrove, who is a truculent scoundrel, by the way.'

Here the two old men laughed heartily. Lot's wife, after that unlucky backward look of hers, must have been an image of cheerfulness as compared with Samuel Grynde at this juncture, so abject was the despair depicted on that gentleman's countenance.

'So I came as the clerk, and Jack took the character of the baronet, and very well he has acted it, barring a little exaggeration. He has made himself as disagreeable as he could, in order to test the fortune-hunting mind, and I must say he has found that order of intellect very elastic. You have put up with a good deal from my friend, Mr. Grynde, and you have not been particularly civil to me. But

I hope you will forgive Jack Blagrove as heartily as I forgive you.'

'You are a set of —— impostors,' exploded Samuel; and he stalked out of the room and away from Cadbury Hall without another word, or so much as a look to the right or the left.

Sir Luke kept the rest of the family till Twelfth-night, with the exception of Waller and Lucy, who went off to Malvern in the baronet's carriage, and there were gay doings at the Hall. The news soon spread through Cadbury, and Samuel Grynde had a bad time of it while the story of Sir Luke's return was fresh in the minds of men, women, and children. The street boys laughed at him openly. That Christian-like spirit which was one of the ornaments of his character ultimately prevailed, however, and a month after Lucy's marriage he accepted an invitation to dine at the Hall.

'If I had been a fortune-hunter, I should have taken this trick of yours more keenly to heart,' he said to his cousin, in a tone of mild reproachfulness, 'but as I was utterly without ulterior views, I can

afford to laugh at the little comedy, now that my first sense of irritation at Lucy's disobedience is over.'

'Quite without ulterior views?' said Sir Luke, slily; 'you told me a different story one day when I was John Blagrove.'

'Sir, I addressed you then as John Blagrove, and ventured to reprove what I considered your presumption in that character. I may have displayed a mistaken zeal, but my independence of mind never wavered.'

'I am glad of that, Samuel,' said the baronet. 'I have not many years to live, and I should like to be friends with all my kith and kin, and to see them happy round me. When I am dead and gone it will not be found that I have dealt unjustly by any one.'

This, though somewhat vague, was comforting.

HER LAST APPEARANCE.

CHAPTER I.

HER TEMPTATION.

'He is a scoundrel,' said the gentleman.

'He is my husband,' answered the lady.

Not much in either sentence, yet both came from bursting hearts and lips passion-pale.

'Is that your answer, Barbara?'

'The only answer God and man will suffer me to give you.'

'And he is to break your heart, and squander your earnings on his low vices—keep you shut up in this shabby lodging, while all the town is raving about your beauty and your genius—and you are to have no redress, no escape?'

'Yes,' she answered, with a look that thrilled him,

'I shall escape him—in my coffin. My wrongs will have redress—at the day of judgment.'

'Barbara, he is killing you.'

'Don't you think that may be the greatest kindness he has ever shown me?'

The gentleman began to pace the room distractedly. The lady turned to the tall narrow glass over the chimney-piece, with a curious look, half mournful, half scornful.

She was contemplating the beauty which was said to have set the town raving.

What did that tarnished mirror show her? A small pale face, wan and wasted by studious nights and a heavy burden of care, dark shadows about dark eyes. But such eyes! They seemed, in this cold light of day, too black and large and brilliant for the small white face; but at night, in the lamplit theatre, with a patch of rouge under them, and the fire of genius burning in them, they were the most dazzling, soul-ensnaring eyes man had ever seen; or so said the cognoscenti, Horace Walpole among them; and Mrs. Barbara Stowell was the last fashion at Covent Garden Theatre.

It was only her second season on those famous boards, and her beauty and talent still wore the bloom of novelty. The town had never seen her by daylight. She never drove in the Ring, or appeared at a fashionable auction, or mystified her admirers at a masquerade in the Pantheon, or drank whey in St. James's Park—in a word, she went nowhere,—and the town had invented twenty stories to account for this secluded existence. Yet no one had guessed the truth, which was sadder than the most dismal fiction that had floated down the idle stream of London gossip. Barbara Stowell kept aloof from the world for three reasons,—first, because her husband was a tyrant and a ruffian, and left her without a sixpence; secondly, because her heart was broken; thirdly, because she was dying.

This last reason was only known to herself. No stethoscope had sounded that aching breast—no stately physician, with eye-glass and gold-headed cane, and chariot and footman, had been called in to testify in scientific language to the progress of the destroyer; but Barbara Stowell knew very well

that her days were numbered, and that her span of life was of the briefest.

She was not in the first freshness of her youth. Three years ago she had been a country parson's daughter, leading the peacefullest, happiest, obscurest life in a Hertfordshire village—when, as ill luck would have it, she came to London to visit an aunt who was in business there as a milliner, and at this lady's house met Jack Stowell, an actor of small parts at Covent Garden—a cold-hearted rascal with a fine person, a kind of surface cleverness which had a vast effect upon simple people, and ineffable conceit. He had the usual idea of the unsuccessful actor, that his manager was his only enemy, and that the town was languishing to see him play Romeo, and Douglas, and the whole string of youthful heroes. His subordinate position soured him; and he sought consolation from drink and play, and was about as profligate a specimen of his particular genus as could be found in the purlieus of Bow Street. But he knew how to make himself agreeable in society, and passed for a 'mighty pretty fellow.' He had the

art of being sentimental too on occasion, could cast up his eyes to heaven and affect a mind all aglow with honour and manly feeling.

Upon this whitened sepulchre Barbara wasted the freshness of her young life. He was caught by her somewhat singular beauty, which was rather that of an old Italian picture than of a rustic English-woman. Beauty so striking and peculiar would make its mark, he thought. With such a Juliet he could not fail as Romeo. He loved her as much as his staled and withered heart was capable of loving, and he foresaw his own advantage in marrying her. So, with a little persuasion, and a great many sweet speeches stolen from the British Drama, he broke down the barriers of duty, and wrung from the tearful, blushing girl a hasty consent to a Fleet marriage, which was solemnized before she had time to repent that weak moment of concession.

The milliner was angry, for she had believed Mr. Stowell her own admirer, and although too wise to think of him as a husband, wished to retain him as a suitor. The Hertfordshire parson was furious, and told his daughter she had taken the first stage to

everlasting destruction without his knowledge, and might go the rest of the way without his interference. She had a step-mother who was very well disposed to widen the breach, and she saw little hope of reconciliation with a father who had never erred on the side of fondness. So she began the world at twenty years of age, with Jack Stowell for her husband and only friend. In the first flush and glamour of a girlish and romantic love, it seemed to her sweet to have him only, to have all her world of love and hope bound up in this one volume.

This fond and foolish dream lasted less than a month. Before that moon which had shone a pale crescent in the summer sky of her wedding night had waxed and waned, Barbara knew that she was married to a drunkard and a gambler, a brute who was savage in his cups, a profligate who had lived amongst degraded women until he knew not what womanly purity meant, a wretch who existed only for self-gratification, and whose love for her had been little more than the fancy of an hour.

He lost no time in teaching her all he knew of his art. She had real genius, was fond of study,

and soon discovered that he knew very little. She had her own ideas about all those heroines of which he only knew the merest conventionalities and traditions. She sat late into the night studying, while he was drinking and punting in some low tavern. Her sorrows, her disappointments, her disgusts drove her to the study of the drama for consolation, and temporary forgetfulness. These heroines of tragedy, who were all miserable, seemed to sympathize with her own misery. She became passionately fond of her art before ever she had trodden the stage.

Jack Stowell took his wife to Rich, and asked for an engagement. Had Barbara been an ordinary woman, the manager would have given her a subordinate place in his troupe, and a pittance of twenty shillings a week. But her exceptional beauty struck the managerial eye. He had half a dozen geniuses in his company, but their good looks were on the wane. This young face, these Italian eyes, might attract the town—and the town had been leaning a little towards the rival house lately.

'I'll tell you what, Stowell,' said the manager, 'I should like to give your wife a chance. But to take

any hold upon the public she must appear in a leading part. I couldn't trust her till she has learnt the A B C of her profession. She must try her wings in the provinces.'

They were standing at noontide on the great stage at Covent Garden. The house was almost in darkness, and the vast circle of boxes shrouded in linen wrappings had a ghostly look that chilled Barbara's soul. What a little creature she seemed to herself in that mighty arena! Could she ever stand there and pour out her soul in the sorrows of Juliet, or the Duchess of Malfi, or Isabella, as she had done so often before the looking-glass in her dingy lodging?

'Jack,' she said, as they were walking home—he had been unusually kind to her this morning,—'I can't tell you what an awful feeling that great, dark, cold theatre gave me. I felt as if I were standing in my tomb.'

'That shows what a little goose you are,' retorted Jack, contemptuously; 'do you think anybody is going to give you such a big tomb as that?'

Mrs. Stowell appeared at the Theatre Royal, Bath, and tried her wings, as the manager called it,

with marked success. There could be no doubt that she had the divine fire, a genius and bent so decided that her lack of experience went for nothing; and then she worked like a slave, and threw her soul, mind, heart—her whole being—into this new business of her life. She lived only to act. What else had she to live for, with a husband who came home tipsy three or four nights out of the seven, and whose infidelities were notorious?

She came to London the following winter, and took the town by storm. Her genius, her beauty, her youth, her purity, were on every tongue. She received almost as many letters as a prime minister in that first season of success; but it was found out in due time that she was inaccessible to flattery, and the fops and fribbles of her day ceased their persecutions.

Among so many who admired her, and so many who were eager to pursue, there was only one who discovered her need of pity and pitied her.

This was Sir Philip Hazlemere, a young man of fashion and fortune—neither fop nor fribble, but a man of cultivated mind and intense feeling.

He saw, admired, and, ere long, adored the new actress ; but he did not approach her, as the others did, with fulsome letters which insulted her understanding, or costly gifts which offended her honour. He held himself aloof, and loved in silence—for the instinct of his heart told him that she was virtuous. But he was human, and his sense of honour could not altogether stifle hope. He found out where she lived, bought over the lodging-house keeper to his interest, and contrived to learn a great deal more than the well-informed world knew about Barbara Stowell.

He was told that her husband was a wretch, and ill-used her; that this brilliant beauty, who shone and sparkled by night like a star, was by daylight a wan and faded woman, haggard with sorrow and tears. If he had loved her before, when the history of her life was unknown to him, he loved her doubly now, and, taking hope from all that made her life hopeless, flung honour to the winds and determined to win her.

Could she be worse off, he asked himself, than she was now—the slave of a low-born profligate—the

darling of an idle, gaping crowd—scorned and neglected at home, where a woman should be paramount? He was rich and his own master—there was all the bright glad world before them. He would take her to Italy, and live and die there for her sake, content and happy in the blessing of her sweet companionship. He had never touched her hand, never spoken to her; but he had lived for the last six months only to see and hear her, and it seemed to him that he knew every thought of her mind, every impulse of her heart. Had he not seen those lovely eyes answer his fond looks sometimes, as he hung over the stage box, and the business of the scene brought her near him, with a tender intelligence that told him he was understood?

If John Stowell should petition for a divorce, so much the better, thought Philip. He could then make his beloved Lady Hazlemere, and let the world see the crowning glory of his life. He was so deeply in love that he thought it would be everlasting renown to have won Barbara. He would go down to posterity famous as the husband of the loveliest woman of his time; like that Duke of Devonshire,

of whom the world knows so little except that he had a beautiful duchess.

One day Sir Philip Hazlemere took courage—emboldened by some new tale of Jack Stowell's brutality,—and got himself introduced to the presence of his beloved. She was shocked at first, and very angry; but his deep respect melted her wrath, and for the first time in her life Barbara learnt how reverential, how humble, real love is. It was no bold seducer who had forced himself into her presence, but a man who pitied and honoured her, and who would have deemed it a small thing to shed his blood for her sake.

He was no stranger to her, though she had never heard his voice till to-day. She had seen him in the theatre—night after night, and had divined that it was some stronger feeling than love of the drama which held him riveted to the same spot, listening to the same play, however often it might be repeated in the shifting repertoire of those days.

She knew that he loved her, and that earnest look of his had touched her deeply. What was it now for her, who had never known a good man's love, to hear

him offer the devotion of a lifetime, and sue humbly for permission to carry her away from a life which was most abject misery!

Her heart thrilled as she heard him. Yes, this was true love—this was the glory and grace of life which she had missed. She could measure the greatness of her loss now that it was too late. She saw what pitiful tinsel she had mistaken for purest gold. But, though every impulse of her heart drew her to this devoted lover, honour spoke louder than feeling, and made her marble. On one only point she yielded to her lover's pleading. She did not refuse him permission to see her again. He might come sometimes, but it must be seldom, and the hour in which he should forget the respect due to her as a true and loyal wife would be the hour that parted them for ever.

'My life is so lonely!' she said, self-excusingly, after having accorded this permission; 'it will be a comfort to me to see you now and then for a brief half-hour, and to know that there is some one in this great busy world who pities and cares for me.'

She had one reason for granting Sir Philip's

prayer, which would have well-nigh broken his heart could he have guessed it. This was her inward conviction that her life was near its close. There was hardly time for temptation between the present hour and the grave. And every day seemed to carry her further from the things and thoughts of earth. Her husband's cruelties stung less keenly than of old; his own degradation, which had been the heaviest part of her burden, seemed further away from her, as if he and she lived in different worlds. Her stage triumphs, which had once intoxicated her, now seemed unreal as the pageant of a dream. Yes, the ties that bind this weak flesh to earthly joys and sufferings were gradually loosening. The fetters were slipping off this weary clay.

CHAPTER II.

HER AVENGER.

Sir Philip showed himself not undeserving Barbara's confidence. He came to the sordid London lodging —a caravansera which had housed wandering tribes of shabby-genteel adventurers for the last twenty years, and whose dingy panelling seemed to exhale an odour of poverty. He brought his idol hothouse flowers and fruits—the weekly papers—those thin little leaflets which amused our ancestors—a new book now and then—and the latest news of the town —that floating gossip of the clubs, which Walpole was writing to Sir Horace Mann. He came and sat beside her, as she worked at her tambour frame, and cheered her by a tenderness too reverent to alarm. In a word, he made her happy.

If she were slowly fading out of life, he did not

see the change, or guess that this fair flower was soon to wither. He saw her too frequently to perceive the gradual progress of decay. Her beauty was of an ethereal type, to which disease lent new charms.

One day he found her with an ugly bruise upon her forehead; she had tried to conceal it with the loose ringlets of her dark hair, but his quick eye saw the mark. When pressed hard by his solicitous questioning, she gave a somewhat lame account of the matter. She had been passing from the sitting-room to her bedchamber last night, when a gust of wind extinguished her candle, and she had fallen and wounded herself against the edge of the chest of drawers. She crimsoned and faltered as she tried to explain this accident.

'Barbara, you are deceiving me!' cried Sir Philip. 'It was a man's clenched fist left that mark. You shall not live with him another day.'

And then came impassioned pleading which shook her soul—fond offers of a sweet glad life in a foreign land—a divorce—a new marriage—honour—station.

'But dishonour first,' said Barbara. 'Can the path of shame ever lead to honour? No, Sir Philip, I will not do evil that good may come of it.'

No eloquence of her lover's could move her from this resolve. She was firm as the Bass Rock, he passionate as the waves that beat against it. He left her at last, burning with indignation against her tyrant.

'God keep and comfort you,' he cried at parting. 'I will not see you again till you are free.'

These words startled her, and she pondered them, full of alarm. Did he mean any threat against her husband? Ought she to warn Jack Stowell of his danger?

Sir Philip Hazlemere and John Stowell had never yet crossed each other's path. The surest place in which not to find the husband was his home. But now Sir Philip was seized with a sudden fancy for making Mr. Stowell's acquaintance—or at any rate for coming face to face with him in some of his favourite haunts. These were not difficult to discover. He played deep and he drank hard, and his chosen resort was a disreputable tavern in a narrow

court out of Long Acre, where play and drink were the order of the night, and many a friendly festivity had ended in a bloody brawl.

Here on a December midnight, when the pavements about Covent Garden were greasy with a thaw, and the link-boys were reaping their harvest in a thick brown fog, Sir Philip resorted directly the play was over, taking one Captain Montagu, a friend and confidant, with him. A useful man this Montagu, who knew the theatres and most of the actors—among them, Jack Stowell.

'The best of fellows,' he assured Sir Philip, 'capital company.'

'That may be,' replied Sir Philip, 'but he beats his wife, and I mean to beat him.'

'What, Phil, are you going to turn Don Quixote and fight with windmills?'

'Never mind my business,' answered Philip; 'yours is to bring me and this Stowell together.'

They found Mr. Stowell engaged at faro with his own particular friends in a private room—a small room at the back of the house, with a window opening on to the leads, which offered a handy exit if

the night's enjoyment turned to peril. The mohawks of that day were almost as clever as cats at climbing a steep roof or hanging on to a gutter.

Captain Montagu sent in his card to Mr. Stowell, asking permission to join him with a friend, a gentleman from the country. Jack knew that Montagu belonged to the hawk tribe, but scented a pigeon in the rural stranger, and received the pair with effusiveness. Sir Philip had disguised himself in a heavy fur-bordered coat and a flaxen periwig, but Mr. Stowell scanned him somewhat suspiciously notwithstanding. His constant attendance in the stage box had made his face very familiar to the Covent Garden actors, and it was only the fumes of brandy punch which prevented Stowell's recognition of him.

The play was fast and furious. Sir Philip, in his character of country squire, ordered punch with profuse liberality, and lost his money with a noisy recklessness, vowing that he would have his revenge before the night was out. Montagu watched him curiously, wondering what it all meant.

So the night wore on, Sir Philip showing unmis-

takable signs of intoxication, under which influence his uproariousness degenerated by-and-by into a maudlin stupidity. He went on losing money with a sleepy placidity that threw Jack Stowell off his guard, and tempted that adventurer into a free indulgence in certain manœuvres which under other circumstances he would have considered to the last degree dangerous.

What was his astonishment when the country squire suddenly sprang to his feet and flung half a tumbler of punch in his face!

'Gentlemen,' cried Stowell, wiping the liquor from his disconcerted countenance, 'the man is drunk, as you must perceive. I have been grossly insulted, but am too much a gentleman to take advantage of the situation. You had better get your friend away, Captain Montagu, while his legs can carry him, if they are still capable of that exertion. We have had enough play for to-night.'

'Cheat! swindler!' cried Sir Philip. 'I call my friend to witness that you have been playing with marked cards for the last hour. I saw you change the pack.'

'It's a lie!' roared Jack.

'No, it isn't,' said Montagu, 'I've had my eye on you.'

'By God! gentlemen, I'll have satisfaction for this,' cried Jack, drawing his sword a very little way out of its scabbard.

'You shall,' answered Sir Philip, 'and this instant. I shall be glad to see whether you are as good at defending your own cur's life as you are at beating your wife.'

'By heaven, I know you now!' cried Jack. 'You are the fellow that sits in the stage box night after night and hangs on my wife's looks.'

Sir Philip went to the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket, then came back with his rapier drawn.

Montagu and the other men tried to prevent a fight, but Sir Philip was inexorably bent on settling all scores on the spot, and Stowell was savage in his cups and ready for anything. Preliminaries were hurried through—a table knocked over and a lot of glasses broken; but noise was a natural concomitant of pleasure in this tavern, and the riot awakened

no curiosity in the sleepy drawer waiting below.

A space was cleared, and the two men stood opposite each other, ghastly with passion; Sir Philip's assumed intoxication thrown off with his fur-bordered coat, John Stowell considerably the worse for liquor.

The actor was a skilled swordsman, but his first thrusts were too blindly savage to be effective. Sir Philip parried them easily, and stood looking at his antagonist with a scornful smile which goaded Stowell to madness.

'I'll wager my wife and you have got up this play between you,' he said. 'I ought to have known there was mischief on foot. She's too meek and pretty-spoken not to be a ——'

The word he meant to say never passed his lips, for a sudden thrust in tierce from Philip Hazlemere's sword pierced his left lung and silenced him for ever.

'When I saw the mark of your fist on your wife's forehead this morning, I swore to make her a widow to-night,' said Sir Philip, as the actor fell face downward on the sanded floor.

The tavern servants were knocking at the door presently. Jack Stowell's fall had startled even their equanimity. Tables and glasses might be smashed without remark—they only served to swell the reckoning,—but the fall of a human body invited attention. Captain Montagu opened the window, and hustled his friend out upon the slippery leads below it, and, after some peril to life and limb in the hurried descent, Sir Philip Hazlemere found himself in Long Acre, where the watchman was calling 'Past four o'clock, and a rainy morning.'

CHAPTER III.

HER FAREWELL SIGH.

BEFORE next evening the town knew that Jack Stowell the actor had been killed in a tavern brawl. Captain Montagu had bribed Mr. Stowell's friends to keep a judicious silence. The man had been killed in fair fight, and no good could come of letting the police know the details of his end. So when the Bow Street magistrate came to hold his interrogatory, he could only extort a confused account of the fatal event. There had been a row at faro, and Stowell and another man, whose name nobody present knew, had drawn their swords and fought. Stowell had fallen, and the stranger has escaped by a window before the tavern people came to the rescue. The tavern people had seen the stranger enter the house, a man with flaxen hair,

and a dark green riding coat trimmed with gray fur, but they had not seen him leave. The magistrate drew the general conclusion that everybody had been drunk, and the examination concluded in a futile manner, which in these days would have offered a fine opening for indignation leaders in the daily papers, and letters signed 'Fiat Justitia,' or 'Peckham Rye;' but which at that easy-going period provoked nobody's notice, or served at most to provide Walpole with a paragraph for one of his immortal epistles.

Sir Philip called at Mrs. Stowell's, and was told that she was ill, and keeping her room. There was a change of pieces announced at Covent Garden, and the favourite was not to appear 'until to-morrow se'nnight, in consequence of a domestic affliction.'

Sir Philip sent his customary offerings of hot-house fruits and flowers to Mrs. Stowell's address, but a restraining delicacy made him keep aloof while the actor's corpse lay at his lodgings, and the young widow was still oppressed with the horror of her husband's death. She might suspect his hand, perhaps, in that untimely end. Would she pity and pardon

him, and understand that it was to redress her wrongs his sword had been drawn? Upon this point Sir Philip was hopeful. The future was full of fair promises. There was only a dreary interval of doubt and severance to be endured in the present.

The thought that Barbara was confined to her room by illness did not alarm him. It was natural that her husband's death should have agitated and overwhelmed her. The sense of her release from his tyranny would soon give her hope and comfort. In the meanwhile Sir Philip counted the hours that must pass before her reappearance.

The appointed night came, and the play announced for representation was Webster's 'Duchess of Malfi, concluding with the fourth Act:' 'the Duchess by Mrs. Stowell.' They were fond of tragedies in those days, the gloomier the better. Covent Garden was a spacious charnel-house for the exhibition of suicide and murder.

Sir Philip was in his box before the fiddlers began to play. The house was more than half empty, despite the favourite's reappearance after her tem-

porary retirement, despite the factitious interest attached to her as the widow of a man who had met his death under somewhat mysterious circumstances a week ago. There was dire weather out of doors—a dense brown fog. Some of the fog had crept in at the doors of Covent Garden Theatre, and hung like a pall over pit and boxes.

The fiddlers began the overture to Gluck's 'Orpheus and Eurydice.' Philip Hazlemere's heart beat loud and fast. He longed for the rising of the curtain with an over-mastering impatience. It was more than a week since he had seen Barbara Stowell; and what a potent change in both their destinies had befallen since their last meeting! He could look at her now with triumphant delight. No fatal barrier rose between them. He had no doubt of her love, or of her glad consent to his prayer. In a little while—just a decent interval for the satisfaction of the world—she would be his wife. The town would see her no more under these garish lights of the theatre. She would shine as a star still, but only in the calm heaven of home.

The brightness of the picture dispelled those

gloomy fancies which the half-empty theatre and its dark mantle of fog had engendered.

The curtain rose, and at last he saw her. The lovely eyes were more brilliant than ever, and blinded him to the hollowness of the wan cheek. There was a thrilling tragedy in her every look which seemed the very breath and fire of genius. The creature standing there, pouring out her story of suffering, was wronged, oppressed; the innocent, helpless victim of hard and bloody men. The strange story, the strange character, seemed natural as she interpreted it. Sir Philip listened with all his soul in his ears, as if he had never seen the gloomy play before—yet every line was familiar to him. The Duchess was one of Barbara's greatest creations.

He hung with rapt attention on every word, and devoured her pale loveliness with his eyes, yet was eager for the play to be over. He meant to lie in wait for her at the stage door, and accompany her home to her lodgings, and stay with her just long enough to speak of their happy future, and to win her promise to be his wife so soon as her weeds could be laid aside. He would respect even idle prejudice

for her sake, and wait for her while she went through the ceremony of mourning for the husband who had ill-used her.

The play dragged its slow length along to the awful fourth act, with its accumulated horrors—the wild masque of madmen, the tomb-maker, the bell-man, the dirge, the executioners with coffin and cords. Barbara looked pale and shadowy as a spirit. a creature already escaped from earthly bondage, for whom death could have no terrors. Thinly as the house was occupied, the curtain fell amidst a storm of applause. Sir Philip stood looking at the dark-green blankness, as if that dying look of hers had rooted him to the spot, while the audience hurried out of the theatre, uneasy as to the possibility of hackney coaches or protecting link-boys to guide them through the gloom.

He turned suddenly at the sound of a sigh close behind him—a faint and mournful sigh, which startled and chilled him.

Barbara was standing there, in the dress she had worn in that last scene—the shroud-like drapery which had so painfully reminded him of death.

She stretched out her hands to him with a sad, appealing gesture. He leaned eagerly forward, and tried to clasp them in his own, but she withdrew herself from him with a shiver, and stood, shadow-like, in the shadow of the doorway.

'Dearest!' he exclaimed, between surprise and delight, 'I was coming round to the stage door. I am most impatient to talk to you, to be assured of your love, now that you are free to make me the most blessed of men. My love, I have a world of sweet words to say to you. I may come, may I not? I may ride home with you in your coach?'

The lights went out suddenly while he was talking to her, breathless in his eagerness. She gave one more faint sigh, half pathetic, half tender, and left him. She had not blessed him with a word, but he took this gentle silence to mean consent.

He groped his way out of the dark theatre, and went round to the stage door. He did not present himself at that entrance, but waited discreetly on the opposite side of the narrow street, till Barbara's coach should be called. He had watched for her

thus, in a futile, aimless manner, on many a previous night, and was familiar with her habits.

There were a couple of hackney coaches waiting in the street under the curtain of fog. Presently a link-boy came hurriedly along with his flaring torch, followed by a breathless gentleman in a brown coat and wig of the same colour. The link-boy crossed the road, and the gentleman after him, and both vanished within the theatre.

Sir Philip wondered idly what the breathless gentleman's business could be.

He waited a long time, as it appeared to his impatience, and still there was no call for Mrs. Stowell's hackney coach. A group of actors came out and walked away on the opposite pavement, talking intently. The gentleman in brown came out again, and trotted off into the fog, still under guidance of the link-boy. The stage doorkeeper appeared on the threshold, looked up and down the street, and seemed about to extinguish his dim oil lamp and close his door for the night. Sir Philip Hazlemere ran across the street just in time to stop him.

'Why are you shutting up?' he asked; 'Mrs. Stowell has not left the theatre, has she?'

It seemed just possible that he had missed her in the fog.

'No, poor thing, she won't go out till to-morrow, and then she'll be carried out feet foremost.'

'Great God! what do you mean?'

'It's a sad ending for such a pretty creature, said the doorkeeper with a sigh, 'and it was that brute's ill usage was at the bottom of it. She's been sickening of a consumption for the last three months—we all of us knew it; and when she came in at this door to-night I said she looked fitter for her coffin than for the stage. And the curtain was no sooner down than she dropped all of a heap, with one narrow streak of dark blood oozing out of he lips and trickling down her white gown. She was gone before they could carry her to her dressing-room. They sent for Dr. Budd, of Henrietta Street, but it was too late; she didn't wait for the doctors to help her out of this world.'

Yes, at the moment when he had looked into that shadow face, seen those sad eyes looking into his with ineffable love and pity, Barbara's troubled soul had winged its flight skyward.

SIR HANBURY'S BEQUEST.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE HEXAM LIBRARY.

THE great northern metropolis, Loomborough, is one of the wealthiest provincial cities in the United Kingdom. Its public buildings are palatial. Its law courts, town-hall, exchange, clubhouses, warehouses, emporiums, boast an architectural magnificence which puts all other provincial cities to the blush. Its cathedral appears to have been neglected, and allowed to run to seed, as it were, for the last three hundred years; but that is a detail. Municipal authorities cannot do everything; and the dinginess of the cathedral brings out the freshness and sharpness of that grand example of the Perpendicular English order near at hand, the Law Courts.

Throughout the city there is an all-pervading air of wealth. One can see at a glance that a million of money can be as easily raised in Loomborough as a few paltry thousands elsewhere. You have only to convince Loomborough that the million is required for the maintenance of her glory, and there it is, in ready money, waiting for the architect's certificate.

Time was when Loomborough was a quiet country town, ringed in with green fields and humble rustic villages, a clear blue river winding through it, and the sweet summer air unpolluted by smoke. But within the last century Loomborough has swollen into a brick-and-mortar octopus, and with each of its hungry suckers has absorbed a village; till the names of those outlying hamlets alone are left, and now serve to distinguish some of the busiest, richest, dirtiest, smokiest, and most crowded districts of the vast city.

Of Loomborough as it was a hundred and thirty years ago—in the days of the famous Forty-five, for instance—it is difficult now-a-days to find a trace, save in some curious old print, exhibited, with proud humility, by a Loomborough printseller. Yet there

is just one little bit of the great city which has an old-world look even to-day, and suggests to one's fancy the quiet provincial town of the past; there is just one building which no sacrilegious hand has improved away from its original quaint beauty; a building which belongs to the age of Elizabeth, and is as unlike any modern edifice of the Tudor or Gothic school as it is possible for one thing to be unlike another.

This is Sir Hanbury Hexam's Library, a rich collection of black-letter books left to the city of Loomborough by a wealthy citizen of the Elizabethan age—with funds for the maintenance of the same, and power to add to their number—in accordance with certain rules made and provided, and a building to contain the same, and to be used as a public reading-room, open every day, except Sunday, free of charge, to the inhabitants of Loomborough. Sir Hanbury also established a college for the youth of the city, and endowed it with an estate amply sufficient for its maintenance. There, in a wide yard under the shadow of the dingy old cathedral, stand the two buildings: the school, tall and square, and

looking of later date than the library; the library, the quaintest, most curious old place that a student need wish to enter—a long low building, with all manner of narrow passages and queer little winding stairs; time-blackened oak panelling that might pass for ebony; ceilings that a man of middle height may touch with his hand; narrow recessed chambers, like loose boxes, where the books are stored in a severe gloom, appropriate rather to meditation than study—for it is but a dusky light that creeps in through the one narrow window which illumines each several recess. These small divisions are fenced off by carved oak doors, as delicately pierced as the tabernacle work above the stalls in a cathedral, which doors are kept religiously locked. Here, in their particular den, you may find the old Chroniclers, the Fathers of the Church, Homer and his translators, Rabelais in his various and numerous editions, Bacon,—all the mighty spirits of departed learning, each, like a hermit, in his particular cave or cell.

One of the labyrinthine passages leads to the public reading-room, where the student-world of Loomborough is to be seen on a winter's day, repre-

sented by three grim-looking men—two gaunt and elderly; one young, but singular of aspect, with elf-locks streaming over his greasy coat-collar. Taking the editions of Homer we have looked at upstairs at a rough guess we may safely say there are ten for each of the three students. One of the grim elders has surrounded himself with stacks of brown leather-covered tomes, as if he were anxious to get a good pennyworth out of Sir Hanbury's bequest. The other has drawn his ancient arm-chair close to the cavernous hearth, where a might sea-coal fire roars red and glorious in a vast iron grate. The young man muses over an open folio in a nook apart—a deep recess in which there is an old painted window, overhanging thé stony yard, and colouring the gray December light.

The room has evidently been unaltered since Sir Hanbury devised it to his fellow-citizens. The low ceiling—the black and polished panelling—a clumsy oak table here and there—a carved oak cabinet of ponderous design—a buffet in the same style—a curious eight-day clock—all carry the evidence of their age upon them. Sir Hanbury Hexam himself,

an old man with a severe visage, pointed beard, and black velvet skull-cap, surveys the students from his portrait over the high oak mantelpiece, and seems to glower upon them in the ruddy firelight.

There is no pleasanter contrast imaginable than to pass from the brisk, busy, prosperous, money-getting modern city, seething and bubbling like a commercial witches' caldron a few yards away, to this silent dusky retreat, where one might fancy the lord of Verulam musing over the uses of deduction and hypothesis, or meditating the more practical question of how to preserve dead poultry by stuffing fowls with snow.

Into this sombre apartment on a certain December afternoon, about ten years ago, came a young man who seemed to have but little in common with the grim student at the table, or the gaunt idler hugging the fire—a young man with a bright handsome face, and a tall straight figure, clad in garments which had a certain un-English look, and were by no means too new. The dark blue overcoat looked as if it had been worn to the verge of shabbiness, and the carefully brushed hat betokened that care

which a man gives to his wardrobe who knows not when and how he may be able to replenish it. The three students glanced at the stranger as if they inwardly resented his intrusion. The stranger surveyed them critically, as if they had been three peripatetic folios dingily bound, like the books on the shelves in the long narrow chambers on the upper story, from which he had just descended, followed by one of the officials carrying half a dozen volumes.

The official deposited his load on one of the disengaged tables and departed. The stranger walked round the room, looked through the painted window —across which the snowflakes were drifting, whitening the stony yard beyond—contemplated Sir Hanbury's portrait, and warmed his hands at the ruddy blaze—the fire-worshipper pushing his chair back half an inch or so to make way for him, with a discontented look.

'Delicious old place!' said the stranger, turning to the fire-worshipper with a pleasant smile; 'charming retreat for the studious! Do you come here often, sir?'

'Every day, except Sundays, in winter,' growled the fire-worshipper.

'And our friend with the pile of books?' asked the stranger, with a backward glance at the table in a corner, where the second grim elder sat behind a rampart of dingy volumes.

'Every day, Sundays excepted, all the year round,' answered the fire-worshipper, gloomily. 'He's writing a book about the end of the world, with a critical analysis of all the prophets, from Daniel down to Dr. Cumming. Nobody will ever give him any money for it; nobody will ever thank him or think any better of him for having written it; no printer, unless he's a madman, will ever be found to print a page of it. But he seems to enjoy writing it,' added the fire-worshipper, with a jerk of his head in the direction of the student. 'He's been at it forty years.'

'And he?' asked the stranger, with a look towards the youthful muser, who was gently dozing over his open folio.

'Oh, he's a local poet. He comes here to read the classics. He sleeps a good deal, I observe, but I

dare say his ideas come to him that way. He contributes short poems to the newspapers gratis, and lives on his friends.'

The stranger sighed, and strolled away from the fire. He seated himself at the table where the librarian had placed his books, opened one of them, a Horace, and tried to read.

Unhappily there are conditions of the mind in which philosophic poetry loses its soothing power. This young man had his own troubles to think about, very real, very near—staring him in the face, jogging him by the elbow. Fate took the shape of the inexorable policeman, always urging him to move on. For him there was no tarrying at street corners: no shelter for him beneath the dark arches of life.

Presently he took a roll of paper from his pocket—the establishment found pen and ink—and began to write, stooping over the page, his pen dashing along with fiery speed, writing as a man writes who pours his heart out upon paper. It was a letter evidently, but what a letter!—six sheets of Bath post covered with that black bold caligraphy. When he had signed his name at the bottom of the last page

he looked at the scattered sheets dubiously, as if debating whether he should read their contents.

'No,' he muttered to himself. 'If I read them I should change my mind and tear them up.'

He folded the sheets hastily, thrust the clumsy budget into a big official-looking envelope, and addressed it to—

Miss Hexam,
Hexam Park,
Near Loomborough.

It had been almost too dark for him to write the address in the dusky corner where he sat, but glancing towards the painted window, he saw that the deep recess which it lighted was vacant. The local poet had gone home to tea. The grim elders had departed. The room was empty.

'So much the better,' muttered the young man; 'I shall have a quiet half-hour before the place closes.'

He had a vague idea that the Hexam Library closed at six o'clock all the year round, and he had not troubled himself to verify that impression.

He went to the recess, took his Horace to the window, and began to pore over the large old-fashioned type. But at four o'clock on a December afternoon there was not light enough in Loomborough to illumine the biggest type. The distant street-lamps shone redly across the intervening gulf of darkness. The Hexam scholars were whooping in the stony yard. The young man looked at them through a bit of ruby glass—the real old ruby—in the painted window, yawned, sat down in the comfortable old oak chair, leaned his head on his hands, and abandoned himself to troublesome perplexities—till sleep stole gently upon his wearied brain, and closed the book of care.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEXAM ESTATE.

It was near the hour of closing, and that ancient student who devoted himself chiefly to the contemplation of the excellent sea-coal fire provided by the Hexam foundation paused in the dusky little vestibule for a chat with the chief librarian. There was no such thing as gas in the Hexam Library. A dim oil lamp illumined the low oak-panelled chamber where the librarian sat at his desk, with a large and ponderous tome before him, in which were recorded the names of the visitors and students of the library. There was a tradition that the autographs of Sir Kenelm Digby and John Evelyn were to be found in those faded old pages, and that a later leaf bore the honoured signature of Samuel Johnson. But the custodian was chary of displaying his treasures. He

loved the book, and dozed away many a quiet afternoon hour, with his gray head reposing affectionately upon the ancient binding.

'There's been a queer chap up yonder this afternoon,' said the fire-worshipper, 'very free and offhand in his manners. Who is he, and where does he come from?'

The librarian opened his book with a solemn visage, and pointed to the latest signature.

There, sprawling across the page, in careless youth's bold characters, appeared the stranger's name—

HANBURY HEXAM,

At the Old Bell Inn, Loomborough.

'What does that mean?' asked the fire-worshipper.

'I don't know. Either it's meant for a joke, or he must be the son of that old clergyman who ruined himself and his family by going to law about the Hexam property—Sir Joshua Hexam's estate, you know. There was a Chancery suit that lasted ever so many years.'

'I remember. But it's ten years since that was over and done with. I've almost forgotten the story.'

'I haven't. My connection with this place made it almost a personal matter, you see; and I studied the case in all its bearings. This Michael Hexam was a clergyman, with a good living and a comfortable little estate of his own—a farm near Bilshott. That's about twenty miles from Loomborough, you know. The farmhouse was very old, almost as old as this library. There was the date under the cornice of the porch, 1603, as large as life; and a fine old place it was. But one day, in a tremendous storm of wind, down comes a chimney-stack—such a chimney-stack as they don't build now-a-days—bricks enough in it to build a house with; and behind the chimney Michael Hexham finds a kind of cupboard or strong-room, containing a lot of old plate and an iron box of old family papers, not one of them later than William the Third's time. Well, these papers, according to Mr. Hexam's view of the case, proved his right to the Hexam estate.'

'How did he make that out?'

'Why, you must know that Sir Hugh Hexam,

our Sir Hanbury's son, who was created a baronet by James the First, died intestate, and without direct heirs, so that his estate passed to the next of kin. The next of kin who came forward to claim the property was a first cousin once removed, being the grandson of Sir Hanbury's younger brother. This young man was a second son, but he brought forward witnesses to prove his elder brother's death in foreign parts. So he got the property, and his descendants have held it from that day to this. Well, this Michael Hexam, the parson of Bilshott, had been taught by his father to consider himself the rightful heir to all the Hexam property in the possession of Sir Joshua—and of others, for the original estate had been divided and subdivided in the course of years—as well as to the baronetcy; but, till the falling of the chimney, there had been missing links in the documentary evidence, and he didn't see his way to putting forward any claim. The discovery of that box of papers altered the aspect of affairs. He submitted his case to a solicitor in Loomborough, who advised him to go in and win. He mortgaged his poor little estate to furnish the sinews of war, and

he filed a bill in Chancery against Sir Joshua Hexam and several other defendants. It was like the mouse going to war with the elephant.'

'I remember the case,' replied the fire-worshipper. 'It was always dragging its slow length through the newspapers. The man was smashed, of course.'

'Well, the man was, but his case wasn't. Some people might have called the issue success—but it killed the litigant. After the case had been before the court for years, off and on, the judge, one of our greatest men, pronounced upon the merits of the claim. Michael Hexam had clearly proved his legitimate descent from the elder brother of Mark Hexam, who succeeded Sir Hugh as next of kin. He had proved that the witnesses brought forward by this Mark Hexam to establish the fact of his elder brother's death were lying witnesses—that the elder brother was then alive, trading as a merchant in Spain, and the father of several sons; no link was missing in the chain of evidence, nothing was wanting. But after acknowledging the justice of the litigant's claim, the judge declared that to re-distribute a vast estate after a lapse of ages would be

to commit a greater injustice than the wrong already done; and that, in his opinion, there was therefore no redress for that wrong, no appeal open to the claimant save to the generosity of the present possessors of the estate, of whom Sir Joshua Hexam was the largest and most distinguished. For the unhappy and mistaken gentleman who had put forward his claim the judge declared he had nothing but compassion; but to favour such claimants would be to introduce an element of confusion into the tenure of estates in the land, and to do harm to the multitude for the advantage of the individual. I know his speech pretty nearly by heart, I've read it so many times.'

'And did Michael Hexam appeal to Sir Joshua's generosity?' asked the other.

'No. He threw himself on the mercy of a greater tribunal than the Court of Chancery. He went straight home that dark December evening and cut his throat.'

'Did he leave any children behind him?'

'One—a son, a mere lad, called Hanbury. But he was abroad at the time, I believe—some said in a

Jesuit college– and nobody seemed to know where to find him. Sir Joshua Hexam wrote a letter to the papers professing his willingness to provide for this boy; but nothing ever came of the offer: the boy never came forward.'

'Curious boy!' exclaimed the fire-worshipper; 'I should come forward fast enough if any one offered to provide for me. And you suppose this is the very individual?' he said, laying his hand on the open page where that dashing signature showed darkly in the dim light.

'There's no other Hanbury Hexam that I know of,' answered the librarian. 'There are Hexams enough, but no Hanburys among them. The old name has died out.'

'Well, good-night,' said the fire-worshipper, departing.

'Good-night,' responded the custodian.

He closed his big volume, took his hat from its peg, and followed, locking various doors as he went, without a thought of the actual Hanbury, at that moment slumbering profoundly in the recess by the painted window.

CHAPTER III.

THE DREAM-PICTURE.

SILENCE perfect and profound descended upon the shadowy old chamber where the stranger slept upon his open book. The ruddy fire still burned cheerily, banked up too liberally to be exhausted in an hour or two. And in the silence and solitude young Hanbury Hexam dreamed a dream.

Time had reversed his glass, and that foolish dreamer fancied himself the son of an age long gone by.

It was in the reign of good Queen Bess, and all Loomborough was like the Hexam Library. The narrow streets were picturesque, with pointed gables and projecting upper stories, queer old mullioned windows, irregular pavements, open gutters through which the town sewage flowed merrily, like a rivulet. Loomborough was a small market town, with a cathedral that seemed ever so much too big for it,

and a margin of fields and wooded hills encircling it. At this Christmas season the fields and hills were white with snow, and the black twigs of the trees bore only icicles.

Young Hanbury Hexam walked through the narrow streets, clad in trunk hose, the worse for wear, and a scarlet doublet in the same condition, and a small gray woollen cloak which hardly shielded him from December's searching blast. He had come from beyond seas, where he had been trying to mend his fortunes with other adventurers, young, penniless, and desperate, like himself. He had failed, and now returned to his native city, feeling himself altogether an unnecessary unit in the sum of existence.

Altogether unnecessary? Well, no; perhaps there was one person who might be just a little sorry if he were beaten down in the conflict. Yet even she might have changed. Three weary years had come and gone since he had gazed into those true fond eyes, and heard those sweet lips speak their promise. What might not those years have done?

Young Hanbury crossed the market-place and approached the tall gloomy-looking cathedral,

There stood the low long pile, to the left of the holy edifice, just as it stands to-day—only instead of being a public library devoted to the worthy citizens of Loomborough, it was Sir Hanbury Hexam's private dwelling-house, with counting-house and warehouses adjoining; for Sir Hanbury was a great merchant, or a merchant who was counted great in those days. He had been knighted, as a reward for having made himself a handsome fortune, and was generally respected in the quiet old city of Loomborough. The young adventurer paused at the gate. There was a garden with a row of fine old elms where there is now only the wide stone-paved yard.

It is not a pleasant thing to beard the lion in his den, and Sir Hanbury had something leonine about him. His young kinsman paused, 'screwed his courage to the sticking place,' as a popular dramatist of that period would have put it, and went in under the leafless elms, across the crisp white snow.

There sat Sir Hanbury, poring over his ledger, in a little room near the door, now the custodian's vestibule. Young Hanbury looked at him through

the mullioned window. There he was, just as in the well-known portrait, with his pointed beard, stiff ruff, and black velvet skull-cap. Young Hanbury shivered in his slashed shoon, and then turned the handle of the door—how the old iron knocker rattled!—and went in, not courageous, but desperate.

Sir Hanbury looked from under his bristly iron-gray brows, surveying the returned wanderer as coolly as if he had been only half an hour absent.

'You did no good yonder, I see, sirrah!' growled the merchant, returning to his ledger.

'No, sir. I have encountered great dangers, and many hardships, and have done no good for myself whatever.'

'Humph! and you come back like a piece of false money; and now that your pride has had a lesson I'll warrant you'll be glad to accept my offer to provide for you—the offer I made when your foolish father cut his throat, after trying to rob me of my fortune.'

'Not a word against my father, sir. If he was a mistaken man, he was at least an honest one, and had right and justice on his side.'

'What are right and justice against centuries of possession?' exclaimed Sir Hanbury, contemptuously. 'Hearken, young Hanbury: when I offered you a stool in my counting-house—which meant a good deal more than you understood by it—and a seat at my chimney corner, you chose to refuse a fair offer, and to look upon me as the cause of your father's death. Yet, had your father been a wise man and brought his papers to me, instead of going to law, I would have given him more than the court awarded him; yes, sirrah, I would have freely given him a younger son's portion.'

'I come back to you, sir, to accept your protection, if you are still in the mind to give it,' said young Hanbury, in a manly and yet humble tone. 'There is no merit in my return—for I have tried my hardest to prosper without your help. Give me the lowest place in your counting-house, and let me labour for my wage. I ask no favour on the score of kindred.'

'And you shall have none,' said the old man, shutting his ledger with a bounce; 'but you shall have some reward for being an honest man and an

affectionate son, and for having tried to live without my help, and for the sake of one that loves you.' The young man's heart beat its fastest at this point. 'There are several reasons for you, sirrah.'

'One is more than enough, sir. 'Tis sweet for an exile to hear the word love.'

'Dorothy!' called the merchant, and lo! the door of an inner room opened—the dark old oaken door—and a girl entered who gave one look at the youth and then grew white as the snow in Sir Hanbury's garden. This was Dorothy Hexam, the old knight's only child; born in late wedlock, pure and pale as a winter rose.

'Dorothy, thy cousin has come home from beyond seas, and he is to live with us henceforward, and to work in the counting-house, and take my place by and by. Take him in, and give him a manchet and a tankard of October to stay his stomach till noon.'

The girl gave one happy cry, and drew near her kinsman like a startled bird. The young man grasped his patron's hand, stooped his handsome head to salute that iron fist with his lips, and then put his arm round Dorothy and led her through the

grim old doorway. They went out of the counting-house together into the homely parlour beyond, and sat down side by side in the deep-recessed window, and sealed the beginning of their new life with a betrothal kiss.

CHAPTER IV.

DOROTHEA.

THE sleeper awoke with a sense of chilness. The great cathedral bell was pealing the hour. He counted the strokes drowsily. Was the clock never going to leave off striking? nine—ten—eleven—twelve.

Midnight. He had fallen asleep in old Sir Hanbury's reading-room, and had been locked in. There was no help for it but to finish the night here. The room was dark; but through the painted window came the friendly gleam of the distant lamps.

'What a fool I must have been to fall asleep in such a place!' he said to himself; 'but a man who has just come off a long sea voyage may be excused for being a trifle sleepy.'

He groped his way to the cavernous old fire-

place, stumbling over a heavy chair as he went. He had a box of vestas in his pocket, and striking one of these, took a brief survey of the scene.

A big iron box half full of coal stood on one side of the hearth, and behind it Hanbury Hexam spied some loose wood

'Good,' he said to himself. 'If I can light a fire, I shan't be so badly off after all.'

He had yesterday's *Times* in his pocket, and with this, the wood, cinders, and coal, he built up a pile, which he kindled with one of those useful vestas from his little tin box.

The old grate was still warm, and the fire burned bravely, the dry wood flaming up with a blue-and-yellow flare, lighting the stern countenance of the knight in his starched ruff and black skull-cap.

Hanbury the younger looked up at his great progenitor wonderingly. His dream came back to him, link by link; such a curiously graphic dream. He had seen the quaint old Elizabethan town by that mystic dream-light, as vividly as in the light of day. He had seen himself in his antique garments; seen the stern visage of the old knight melt into kindli-

ness; and, last and best of all, had seen Dorothy's fair face—so like a living face he had looked on in the hopeless agony of parting three years ago.

'Perhaps you were not such a bad old fellow after all,' he said to himself, dreamily contemplating the portrait over the mantelpiece, which seemed to change its expression with every change in the flickering light. 'If you were alive, and I were to appeal to you, I wonder whether you would help me. Would your prototype and successor, Sir Joshua, help me, I wonder, if I were to go to him now, and remind him of his letter to the newspapers?'

The question made him thoughtful. He looked back at his brief and troubled past, and wondered how much of it had been foolishness. Ten years ago Hanbury Hexam had been a friendless young scholar in a great Continental school—a school where a good education was to be had at the lowest possible cost. It would hardly be possible to imagine a lad more utterly alone in the world at fifteen years of age than this young Hexam. His mother was dead. His father had given himself up body and soul to his fatal Chancery suit. Brothers or sisters he had none.

There was an aunt, a somewhat strong-minded maiden lady, Michael Hexam's sister, who cared a little for the desolate boy, and who wrote him an occasional letter telling him the progress of the Chancery suit, and who from time to time sent him a parcel of clothing.

From his aunt, Sarah Hexam, the boy received the tidings of his father's miserable end. In the same letter—a bitter, passionate letter—she told young Hanbury how Sir Joshua Hexam had offered to provide for him.

'I do not know how you may look at the matter,' she said finally, 'but I consider that man your unhappy father's murderer.'

The boy wrote back indignantly to say that he would not accept a sixpence from Sir Joshua to save him from starving. Miss Hexam applauded his resolution. She had a little annuity of her own which she was ready to share with her nephew, taking it for granted that he would be on the high road to fortune before she died. She went over to Tours, where Hanbury was at school, and in that foreign city lived on a mere nothing during his final years of tutelage; and three years after her brother's

death she set out with the lad of eighteen on a voyage of adventure,—she a hardy active woman of fifty-four; he an ardent poetic youth, full of high hopes and noble aspirations.

Very happy was the life these two led together; very moderate their desires, very simple their habits. They travelled through Switzerland and Germany, making long halts in quaint old towns, where the necessaries of life were cheap. Hanbury read a great deal, sketched from nature, and wrote not a little. He sent bright, lively papers to the London magazines, and thereby gained a comfortable addition to his aunt's small income. However humbly they lived —with a simplicity that was almost Spartan—they always lived like a lady and gentleman, and were never mistaken for anything else.

They were at a quiet little water-drinking settlement near the Black Forest, a spring lately discovered by the German doctors, and only frequented by those who were indifferent to the allurements of fashion—when the event occurred which first introduced poetry and passion into Hanbury's life.

He had wandered somewhat far afield one bright

September day with his sketch-book, when he came to an old quarry among the hills—a rough amphitheatre of stone embedded in the craggy hill-side. Above, on the hill-top, a grove of firs stood darkly out against the clear blue sky.

On the upper edge of the quarry, about forty feet from the ground on which he stood, Hanbury Hexam saw a fluttering figure in a white gown, with a scarlet scarf that made a patch of bright colour among the greens and grays of grass and stone.

'Rather a dangerous place,' he thought, 'for a lady to wander in; but I suppose she knows her ground.'

Just at this moment he became aware of the presence of a bony female in a lanky gray costume, a mushroom hat, and green spectacles, who was telegraphing wildly to the distant girl with a large buff parasol.

'Go back!' she screamed; 'go back the other way! the ground isn't safe where you're standing. Go back, Dorothea!'

The ground upon which that light figure was perched certainly had an insecure look. That edge of the hill had been partly undermined by the

excavations below. It was an overhanging path, which might give way at any moment.

'What shall I do?' cried the lady in the green spectacles, tragically. 'I am sure Miss Hexam is in danger, and I don't know how to get at her up there, even if my breath would allow me to climb, which it will not.'

Miss Hexam! This was rather startling for Hanbury. But there was no time to be wasted upon surprise or interrogation.

'I'll find my way up to her,' he said cheerily; and, after one brief and comprehensive survey of the scene, began the ascent.

To the admiring eyes of Miss Limber, of the green spectacles, he seemed to bound from crag to crag with the practised grace of the chamois-hunter in 'Manfred'—over the little patches of sunburnt slippery grass, now on a bit of blue-gray stone, now on a crumbling ledge of sienna-coloured clay, till with one bound he leaped upon the narrow verge, and stood beside the damsel in white.

'Allow me to lead you down by some more secure path,' he said, bareheaded. 'The lady below there is

much alarmed for your safety; and, indeed, this is hardly a secure spot for your rambles.'

'My poor dear governess!' said the young lady, smiling. 'Was she really frightened? I am sure you are very kind to come after me. I climbed up here easily enough, but it does seem rather difficult to go down again; and I confess that I was beginning to feel just a little uncomfortable.'

How pretty she was! A fair and delicate prettiness; a pale oval face framed in dark-brown hair; soft dark eyes; a mouth like Cupid's bow.

'I feel sure there is an easier way down behind those firs,' said Hanbury, 'if you will let me take you that way.'

'You shall take me any way you like that is safe,' she answered easily, 'and that will make poor Miss Limber happy. Look at her waving that parasol at me. I haven't the faintest idea what she means.'

'She means that you are to trust yourself with me, Miss Hexam,' said Hanbury.

It cost him a slight effort to pronounce the name. Could this be Sir Joshua's only child, the great heiress of Hexam Park? Surely not. There were

innumerable Hexams in Loomborough. Why should this fair girl be his enemy's daughter ?

They crossed the hill-top, and on the other side, below the fir trees, beheld a winding path which was safe and easy enough. Down this Hanbury led Miss Hexam. How daintily she stepped from stone to stone ! now on the soft green moss, now on the rough crag. To watch the little feet in their neat buckled shoes was the pleasantest thing in the world ; and then, how sweet to look up at the fair young face, with its happy, innocent smile ! Hanbury wished that descent had gone ten thousand fathoms deep into the bowels of the earth.

If he had rescued her charge from the roaring sea or the raging flames, Miss Limber could not have thanked the young man with more enthusiasm than she displayed. They all three walked home to Gesundheitbrunnen together, a walk of nearly four miles ; during the progress of which Miss Limber, to whom there was no music sweeter than the sound of her own voice, told Hanbury all about herself and her pupil.

The young lady was Miss Hexam, daughter and

heiress of the great Sir Joshua Hexam, 'of whom you have doubtless heard,' said Miss Limber, pompously. She was travelling in the care of her governess; 'and attended only by a courier and maid,' added Miss Limber, with proud humility. She had come to Gesundheitbrunnen in quest of health, the place having been specially recommended by a distinguished Loomborough physician.

'Sir Joshua would have accompanied us,' said Miss Limber, 'but his enormous commercial responsibilities render his prolonged absence from Loomborough impossible; and Miss Hexam's medical advisers recommend a residence of three months at the springs.'

'Have you been here long?' asked Hanbury.

'We came at the beginning of August, and we are to remain till the end of October.'

It was now early in September. Nearly two months of bliss, thought Hanbury, if he could persuade his aunt to remain so long. Luckily she had a fancy for swallowing inordinate quantities of mineral waters, with a vague idea that she was benefiting her constitution.

They came to Gesundheitbrunnen at last, after a four-mile walk that had seemed as nothing to Hanbury. At parting it was incumbent upon him to tell Miss Limber his name. He had debated the advisability of giving a false name as he came along, but his frank mind revolted from the idea of deception, so he handed Miss Limber his card.

'Mr. Hexam!' she screamed. 'How extraordinary!'

'I have the honour to be a namesake of your pupil's. But I believe Hexam is not an uncommon name at Loomborough.'

'True,' replied Miss Limber, 'the original Hexam estate has been divided and subdivided among numerous branches of the family. Sir Joshua would not be the great man he is if he had not strengthened his position as a landed proprietor by commercial enterprise.'

They parted outside the one hotel of the place, a rambling wooden building, to which a room or two had been added from time to time as the reputation of the waters increased. Miss Hexam, her governess, and servants had a small annex to themselves,

and were considered the most important residents at the hotel.

After this, Hanbury and Miss Hexam were continually meeting. Pedestrian exercise was an important feature in the *régime* prescribed by the young lady's medical advisers, and she spent the greater part of every fine day rambling in the forest or among the hills, Miss Limber toiling on beside her, or sitting by the wayside to rest while the younger lady explored some wild romantic spot near at hand.

In these walks Hanbury's attendance was freely permitted. Miss Limber had literary proclivities, read German indifferently, and finding Hanbury a master of the language, gladly availed herself of his assistance. They read 'Faust' together; yes, valorously toiled through the bewildering second part of that mighty work. And then Miss Limber confided to Hanbury the secret of her own authorship. She had written a novel, and although no publisher had yet been found gifted with a mind wide enough to appreciate that great panorama of human life, Miss Limber's faith in her own genius was in no wise shaken.

She introduced Hanbury to her own particular fictitious world, read him chapters of the novel, and, in a word, derived so much pleasure from his society herself, that she entirely overlooked the danger there might be in such society for her pupil. Time glided pleasantly on. The two young people read together, sketched together, worshipped nature together, and lived as in a happy dream.

Hanbury was awakened awfully from that sweet dream-life by the sudden death of his good old aunt, who expired in a fit of apoplexy, brought on possibly by over-indulgence in chalybeate waters. This was a bitter blow to his affections, and it left him penniless. Miss Hexam's income died with her. Hanbury had neither trade nor profession. He had lived a careless holiday life, and now, in his two-and-twentieth year, had nothing better to look to than the pen of a ready writer for maintenance in the present and fortune in the future.

And how with such prospects as these was he to aspire to the hand of Sir Joshua Hexam's daughter?

He paid Dorothea one farewell visit after his aunt's death; told her all the truth about himself,

and told her that he was going into the busy working world to seek his fortune.

'If I win in the great game of chance, you will hear of me again, Dorothea,' he said. 'If I lose——'

'Whether you win or lose, I hope to see you again,' she said, tenderly. 'But oh, Hanbury, why not accept my father's offer? He would receive you as an adopted son; he would make your future so easy. I have often heard him speak of you, and regret his ignorance of your fate.'

'He is very good, but I had rather depend upon my own right arm than on any patron in the world, answered Hanbury, proudly.

He had taken his own way, and had tried what his right arm would do for him in America and in Australia, and had come back a failure; not for lack of energy, or of industry, or of talent; but fate had been against him, and he had never found a friend to give him a helping hand.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE DREAM CAME TRUE.

The cold winter night struggled through the thick winter darkness at last, and found Hanbury Hexam still seated before the wide old hearth, absorbed in thought. Long as the hours had been, they had not been too long for the struggle betwixt pride and fate. When the day dawned, Hanbury had made up his mind to apply to Sir Joshua Hexam for a stool in that commercial magnate's counting-house. Long ago common sense had taught him to acquit Sir Joshua of any blame in the matter of the fatal Chancery suit; yet pride had prevented his acceptance of the great man's help.

At nine o'clock the sub-librarian unlocked the door, and Hanbury was free. He walked straight to Sir Joshua's warehouse, a palatial building in one of

the richest streets in the rich city of Loomborough. Very different was Sir Joshua's counting-house from the quiet little room where the dreamer had seen Sir Hanbury poring over his ledger. Sir Joshua's offices were like a bank: such shining mahogany desks; such glittering brass rails dividing the desks; such splendid stoves and glowing fires, and wonderful contrivances in the way of speaking-tubes; such well-dressed clerks, with pens behind their ears, and a general appearance of being weighed down by the magnitude of the business.

When Hanbury asked to see Sir Joshua, the gentleman to whom he had addressed himself looked as surprised as if he had offered to send up his card to Queen Victoria.

'Have you an appointment?' he asked.

'No.'

'Quite impossible, then; Sir Joshua never sees any one except by appointment.'

'Be so kind as to take him my card, and ask him to favour me with an early appointment,' said Hanbury.

The clerk looked at the card, and departed

wondering. Five minutes afterwards Hanbury was closeted with Sir Joshua in a handsome apartment, Turkey carpeted, warmed by a huge fire, provided with all the luxurious appliances that embellish the dull labour of commercial life.

On the 27th of December, after a sorely desolate Christmas, spent for the most part in the snowy streets of Loomborough, Hanbury took his seat in his kinsman's office.

'Work honestly, and you shall be honestly rewarded,' the old man had said to him, not unkindly. He looked so like Sir Hanbury of the dream-picture as he made this little speech.

Hanbury did work honestly and well. Those three years of hard fighting with ill fortune had sharpened wits that were originally bright. Before Hanbury had been a year in the office he had proved himself worth three ordinary clerks, and Sir Joshua had invited him to dine at Hexham Park every alternate Sunday.

In the second year of the young man's clerkship there came a great commercial crisis. House after house went down as with the shock of an earth-

quake; and for three awful days the great firm of Hexam and Co. tottered with the fall of its allies. In that crisis Hanbury Hexam displayed an energy and a firmness which went far to right the ship. Sir Joshua was ill at the time, and thus the master spirit of the firm was wanting when his presence seemed most needed. From that hour the young man was taken to his employer's heart, and became verily an adopted son.

Two years later he was a junior partner in the great house, and Dorothea Hexam's betrothed husband.

It was on one of the dark days before Christmas that the two lovers went together to the old library at Loomborough. An important purchase of books had just been made for the institution, and Hanbury wished Dorothea to see them.

Perhaps it was only an excuse for showing his betrothed the quaint old chamber where he had dreamed that curious dream.

The scene was almost the same as on his first visit. There was the old man hugging the fire, and there sat the compiler of prophecies, fenced in with

books at his distant table. The local poet was absent.

Hanbury led Dorothea to the recess by the painted window, and they seated themselves there side by side.

'What a dear old place it is!' said Dorothea. 'It's ages since I've been here.'

'Yes, it's a nice old place,' answered her happy lover, 'I've reason to be fond of it. I owe all my present happiness to a dream I had here. I had made up my mind to sail for New Zealand in the next emigrant ship, to work as a field labourer perhaps, when I got there; and I had written you a long letter of farewell, when I fell asleep, and had a curious dream about him,' pointing to Sir Hanbury's portrait.

And then he told her his dream.

'Such dreams are sent by our guardian angels, Hanbury,' she said gently, 'to teach us faith in God.'

A VERY NARROW ESCAPE.

It was not quite a year since Mr. George Hartfield, the leading solicitor in the market town of Norbury, had returned from his honeymoon tour, bringing with him the prettiest little wife that the good old town had boasted for a long time. George was only thirty years of age, but his wife looked a mere girl, and was at least eleven years his junior, much to the disgust of more mature damsels, who would have been very willing to step into the proprietorship of the good-looking young lawyer and his prim respectable old house, which was one of the most conspicuous dwellings in the upper and more rural part of the High Street. Mr. Hartfield had inherited an excellent business from his father, and was altogether a person of some importance in the opinion of the

Norbury world at large, and of himself in particular.

The wife was a shy girlish creature, who seemed scarcely fit to be mistress of that big formal house, with its shining wainscoted walls and grim old furniture—furniture that had been fashionable in the days of George's grandfather—gloomy old mahogany four-posters and walnut-wood presses, in the polished panels whereof sentimental little Alice Hartfield, whose head was a kind of branch depot of the circulating library, used to fancy she saw ghosts in the gloaming. In honest truth, she did not take much to the house in the High Street, and looked back with fond regretfulness to the bright country home from which George had won her; but Mr. Hartfield being of an arbitrary temper, and convinced that the old house was perfection, she had never ventured to hint her dislike. It must be owned that the evenings were long and dull for so girlish a matron. George Hartfield was often out—sometimes at a public dinner at the Crown Hotel, sometimes at a social club held at the same prosperous tavern, sometimes playing billiards with bachelor clients—

all in the way of business, of course, as he told his wife; but the evenings during which he was absent were not the less lonely on that account.

Mr. Hartfield employed three clerks: a gentlemanly young man, who was articled; a stripling, for copying and out-of-door work; and a grey-haired old man, with a face upon which there was a look of settled melancholy. Mr. Bestow, the articled clerk, and Thomas Dregger, the stripling, had christened him Old Dismal, and spoke of him commonly by that disrespectful sobriquet. If he ever heard the name, it apparently troubled him very little. He rarely spoke, except so far as his business required him to speak; and, in the two years that he had been with Mr. Hartfield, he had not advanced by so much as one step towards intimacy with his fellow-workers. He lived three miles out of Norbury, walking to and from the office in all weathers, and no one had ever seen the inside of his home.

Her first year of married life closed in sorrow and disappointment for Alice Hartfield. The baby-stranger, from whose coming she had expected so much pleasure, only opened its eyes upon this world

to close them again for ever. She dwelt upon this loss with a grief which seemed to her husband just a little exaggerated, and it is possible that her tears and sad looks drove him to his club at the 'Crown' rather more often this year than in the previous winter. It was not that he was unkind or indifferent to his pretty young wife. He fancied that she was perfectly happy with her books and work and piano, in the interval between six o'clock and eleven, at which hour he punctually returned to his abode, as sober as when he left home, well pleased with himself and with the world at large.

The two younger clerks commented very freely upon the solicitor's conduct in his domestic capacity.

'If I had such a pretty wife, I wouldn't leave her alone evening after evening as our governor does,' remarked the stripling, pertly; 'I wonder he isn't ashamed of himself.'

'He ought to take her more into society certainly,' replied Mr. Bestow, the articled clerk, who was in much request in that brilliant circle which constituted Norbury 'society.'

Mr. Morgan, the old clerk, looked up from his desk with a sigh.

'What, my funereal friend,' cried Bestow, 'do you mean to say you are interested in the subject?'

'I am very much interested in Mrs. Hartfield,' the old man answered quietly; 'she is always kind to me. It is a good sign when a woman of her age takes the trouble to be polite to an old man like me—a sign that the heart's in the right place. I wish her husband understood her better. I don't think she wants to be taken to tea parties, Mr. Bestow; but I do think she wants a little more sympathy.'

This was a long speech for Mr. Morgan. The two younger men stared at him superciliously, and then went on with their work. From the first day of her coming to be mistress of the old house William Morgan had shown himself interested in his master's wife. He was always pleased to perform any little service for her, and seemed needlessly grateful for the smallest kindness at her hands. His way home took him the whole length of the town; and Mrs Hartfield used to entrust him with her books to

change at the circulating library, an office which he performed with much taste and discretion.

'I take the liberty to carry a volume home with me for the night, at odd times,' he said to her one day.

'What, Mr. Morgan, do you read novels?'

'No, madam; but I have a niece living with me who is glad to skim the volumes of an evening.'

'Indeed! You never spoke of her before. Is your niece married?'

'She—she is a widow—to all intents and purposes. Her husband deserted her three years ago, and left her and her boy on my hands. But we are very happy together, I thank God.'

'The husband must have been a bad man.'

'He was a most consummate scoundrel!' answered the old clerk, with suppressed intensity.

'How hard it must be for you to work for all three!' said Alice.

'It will be harder for the two that are left when I am gone. My niece is able to earn a little money at her needle, but very little. It is a dark look-out for the future.'

One morning, early in the spring, Mr. Hartfield came into the office with a very dashing gentleman, a new client, who had just come into a handsome fortune by the death of old Squire Comberford, of Comberford Hall, seven miles from Norbury. Edgar Comberford, the new proprietor, was a nephew of the old man, and had been a schoolfellow of George Hartfield's fifteen years before. Since that time he had disappeared from the ken of Norbury, and was supposed to have led a wild life in foreign lands. He was eminently handsome, and in high spirits at his accession to the Comberford Hall estate.

'There are the papers, title-deeds, leases, and so on,' said George Hartfield, pointing to three japanned boxes on a shelf in the office; 'do you want to see them?'

'Not I, George,' answered Mr. Comberford, gaily; 'it is quite enough for me to know that the lands are free from mortgages, and that the rents come in briskly. The papers couldn't be in better hands. Holloa! what's that?'

It was Mr. Morgan, the old clerk, who had put

his head in at the door of the office, and suddenly withdrawn it.

'Only one of my clerks,' answered George Hartfield. 'Come in, Morgan!' he bawled; but the clerk did not reply, and the two young men left the office —Mr. Comberford to be introduced to his friend's wife.

He was not a little surprised by her grace and beauty; not a little fascinated by her shy, girlish manners. He stayed to dinner, and contrived to make himself agreeable to both his host and hostess, giving an animated account of his adventures in Mexico during the last two years.

'I should never have come from there, George, but for my uncle's death,' he said. 'I was thoroughly cleaned out when I left England, and meant to live and die abroad.'

After this social dinner Mr. Comberford dropped in very often at his friend's house. He seemed to have some perpetual reason for seeing the solicitor on business, and happened, by a kind of fatality, to call when the master of the house was out. Would he leave a statement of his business with the clerk?

No, he would wait; and he strolled unannounced into the little sitting-room at the back of the offices, where Mrs. Hartfield spent her mornings. It was the prettiest room in the house, opening into a small garden, at the end of which there was a narrow creek —an inlet from the river that flowed through Norbury. By and by Mr. Comberford took to approaching the house by this way. He was an expert waterman, and spent a good deal of his time on the river. So it was an easy and natural thing for him to moor his boat at the bottom of George Hartfield's garden, and step on shore. He always found Alice in her sitting-room, and he found a look in her face which told him his visits were not unwelcome. He was a thorough man of the world, and knew the danger of the game he was playing, nor did he yield without a struggle to the temptation that had overtaken him Such a heart as he had was hit harder than it had been of late years. The outside world of Norbury had not yet been awakened to the scandal of Mr. Comberford's frequent visits to the lawyer's house, nor was the lawyer himself alarmed by them; but the younger clerks were quick to remark upon the

length and frequency of these morning calls, and on George Hartfield's blindness to the fact.

Edgar Comberford had been settled at the Hall for six months, when George Hartfield had occasion to go to Paris on business. He had intended to take his wife with him for the trip, but the weather was sultry and oppressive, and he went alone. Mrs. Hartfield seemed very little disappointed by this change in his plans. Mr. Comberford had assured her that Paris was quite unbearable in July. It was upon his business that George Hartfield was engaged. He went to make a settlement with a Parisian money-lender who had advanced money to the young man in the days of his insolvency, and who now put in an exorbitant claim for interest.

The first day of Mr. Hartfield's absence went by without any visit from Mr. Comberford, but in the evening, when the clerks were gone and Alice was sitting alone and very low-spirited, the familiar sound of the boat grating against the woodwork at the bottom of the garden struck upon her ear, and brought a sudden blush into her cheeks. She looked up with a movement of surprise as Edgar Comberford

came across the garden. He came in at the open window with the air of a person who had a perfect right to be there, and seated himself opposite to Alice, at the little table where she was drinking tea.

'I thought you would give me a cup of tea after my row, Mrs. Hartfield,' he said, 'and I could not pass the creek without begging for one. I dread going home to the desolation of the Hall—empty rooms and a cross old housekeeper. I think I shall go back to Mexico before the year is out.'

Alice gave a little start.

'What!' she said, 'leave the Hall for ever?'

'In all probability for ever. A man seldom comes home a second time from such a place as Mexico.'

'But why should you go back there? why should you be tired of the Hall so soon?'

'Why should I be tired of life altogether? Why should I wish to run away from myself—from you?'

And then he went on to speak of his love for her, in dark hints rather than in plain words. She tried to reprove him, tried to show him that she was angry, but the attempt was a very feeble one. She could only insist that he should leave her imme-

diately. He did leave her, but not immediately, and not till she had changed insistence into piteous entreaty.

The boat had scarcely shot away in the twilight when the door between the sitting-room and the office opened, and the old clerk, Morgan, appeared on the threshold.

'You here, Mr. Morgan!' exclaimed Alice, making a vain attempt to conceal her tears; 'I thought all the clerks had gone.'

'I had some letters to copy, Mrs. Hartfield. Can I do anything for you in the town to-night?'

'Nothing, thank you.'

He lingered, twisting the brim of his shabby old hat round and round in his thin wrinkled hands.

'I wish to heaven I might speak to you freely,' he said at last, 'without offending or wounding you.'

'About what?'

'About the man who has just left you.'

'Mr. Comberford, my husband's friend?'

'Your husband's direst, deadliest foe—and yours,' answered the old man, passionately.

'What right have you to say that?' asked Alice, trembling with indignation.

'The right given me by my knowledge of mankind, and, above all, by my knowledge of Edgar Comberford.'

'What knowledge can you have of Mr. Comberford? Did you ever see him before he came to this office?'

'Never; but his name is a word of dire meaning in my life. Ask him what became of the girl he stole away from an honourable home and left in a wretched London lodging four years ago. Ask him to tell you the fate of Bessie Raynor.'

'Why should I trouble myself about his affairs? And who is this Bessie Raynor?'

'Never mind who she is, Mrs. Hartfield. She was a good girl before he met her. She will never be a happy woman again. Ask him about her if you doubt what I tell you, and you will see by his countenance whether he is innocent or guilty. Knowing what I do, I am bound to warn you of his real character.'

'I do not require any such warning,' replied Alice,

coldly; 'Mr. Comberford is no more to me than any other client of my husband's. And I beg that you will not trouble yourself to dictate my conduct to him.'

'I see that I have offended you.'

'I do not like spies.'

'I am no spy, Mrs. Hartfield. I am an old man, and have had bitter cause to know the wickedness of the world. Your sweet face has been a kind of light to me ever since your husband brought you home to this house. God forbid that light should ever be clouded by the shadow of disgrace!'

He bowed and left her—left her standing in a reverie, looking absently out upon the dusky fields beyond the little garden and the winding creek. She was angry, unhappy, bewildered.

'I wish George had taken me to Paris,' she thought. 'He ought not to leave me alone in a dreary old house like this, to be insulted by a clerk.'

After this evening she passed Mr. Morgan without speaking to him, much to the old man's concern. The days went by, and not one passed without a visit from Edgar Comberford, although in that first even-

ing Alice had expressly forbidden him to call again during her husband's absence. He was not easily to be put aside. He knew the weakness of the girl's unschooled nature, and knew how to trade upon it. His tender talk of the life that might have been had Alice been free—his glowing descriptions of distant lands which those two might have seen, side by side, of countries where the commonest life was a kind of poetry—charmed her in spite of herself. She knew the guilt involved in this dangerous pleasure, and hated herself for her weakness, and yet looked forward with a dull sense of dread to her husband's return. Nothing could tempt her to sin against George Hartfield, she told Edgar, however unsuited they might be to each other. She was his wife, and would do her duty to the end of her life. But the tempter was not convinced.

One day she ventured to ask him about Bessie Raynor. He looked startled, Alice thought, at the sound of the name, but he declared that it was strange to him; and Alice was weak enough to believe his assertion. It had been a mere ruse of the old clerk's to frighten her, she thought. The poor

dismal old creature had tried to make her miserable about the only acquaintance that gave her any pleasure.

Mr. Hartfield had been away ten days, when Mr. Comberford came in upon Alice suddenly one morning with a very grave countenance. The neat little parlour-maid was only just clearing away the breakfast-things when he came, and lingered inquisitively to hear the meaning of this early visit.

'I am sorry to say I have rather bad news of your husband, Mrs. Hartfield,' he said in answer to Alice's expression of surprise. 'He has been taken ill with some kind of low fever, which is a good deal about in Paris just now. Don't be alarmed; it is nothing very serious; but he wants you to go across to him. His doctor, a Frenchman, has written to me, but there is an enclosure for you from the patient.'

He handed her a slip of foreign paper, on which there were a few lines in her husband's hand:

'DEAR ALICE,—Please come over to me at once, if you are not afraid of the journey. Comberford can escort you, as he is wanted over here.—Yours, &c.,

'G. H.'

'You'll not be afraid of the journey?' asked Mr. Comberford.

'Not at all; I should not mind going alone.'

'But, you see, I am due there, so you cannot deny me the pleasure of being your escort.'

'It is not a very pleasurable occasion,' said Alice, with some embarrassment, as she twisted the slip of writing round and round her fingers. She was wondering whether the strict moralists of Norbury would altogether approve of such an escort.

Mr. Comberford gave her little time to think. He went into the clerks' office to tell Mr. Bestow of his employer's illness, and to make inquiries about the London trains. William Morgan looked up from his desk and watched his master's client thoughtfully as he lounged against the mantelpiece reading the time-table.

There was no possibility of going to Paris earlier than by the night mail. Mrs. Hartfield would have to go first to London—a three hours' journey. There was a train left Norbury at a quarter to four in the afternoon, which would take the travellers in ample time for the Dover mail. Mr. Comberford decided

upon going by this, and left Alice in order to make his preparations for the journey. He did not, however, go back to the Hall, but fidgeted in and out of the lawyer's house several times in the course of the day on some pretence or other, spending the interval at the 'Crown,' where he drank brandy and soda-water to an extent that astonished the waiters. But in spite of all he had drunk, he looked pale and anxious when he came at three o'clock ready to take Mrs. Hartfield to the station.

Alice was just stepping into the fly, when William Morgan came out of the house, with a carpet bag in one hand and a morocco office bag in the other.

'Why, where the deuce are you going?' asked Mr. Comberford.

'I am to be your fellow-traveller, sir; at least, I am going second class by the same train.'

'To London?'

'No, sir, to Paris. Mr. Bestow sends me across with papers.'

'Why, what consummate folly of Bestow's! Your master is not fit for business. He won't be able to attend to anything for days to come.'

'I hope he may be better than you think, sir. In any case, I am bound to obey Mr. Bestow's orders.'

He spoke in a mechanical kind of tone, nor did his countenance express the faintest interest in his work.

Mr. Comberford laughed grimly to himself as they drove away with the old man on the box.

'That old fool's company can make very little difference,' he muttered, and then grew moodier than he was wont to be in Alice Hartfield's company.

He brightened considerably by and by, when they were alone in a first-class compartment, flying Londonwards at express rate; and he succeeded in making Alice believe that her husband's illness was only a trifling matter, and that she had no occasion to be anxious about him.

'Men think so much of the slightest touch of illness,' he said, 'and are always in a hurry to summon their wives. We are such helpless creatures, you see, and so miserable without the comfort of a woman's presence.'

And then he went on to speak of his own solitary position.

'What is to become of me in the hour of sickness, Alice,' he asked, 'with no one but a gloomy old housekeeper to care for me?'

'You will marry by and by, I dare say, and have a wife to care for you.'

'Never, Alice. There is only one woman on earth I care for; and if she cannot be my wife, I will go down to my grave a bachelor.'

'You must not talk to me like that; it is taking a mean advantage of my position. You know that I am with you at my husband's wish.'

'Yes, you have his order for the journey. Poor dear George, what a fine bold hand he writes, doesn't he?'

Mrs. Hartfield did not see the sardonic grin which accompanied this trivial remark, nor did Mr. Comberford again offend her by any allusion to his hopeless passion. It was pitch dark when they reached Dover, not a star in the sky, and a high wind blowing. There was considerable confusion in getting on board, and Mrs. Hartfield scarcely knew where she was till she found herself standing on the deck of a steamer arm-in-arm with Edgar Comberford, while

the lamps of Dover receded rapidly from her vision. Her companion persuaded her to remain on deck.

'There is an atmosphere of sea-sickness below that would inevitably make you ill,' he said. 'Let me find you a comfortable corner, where you can be secure from wind and weather.'

He found a sheltered nook by one of the paddle-boxes, and here Mrs. Hartfield sat comfortably wrapped in shawls and railway rugs, and amused by her fellow-traveller's conversation. He seemed now in the highest possible spirits, and did his uttermost to entertain her; but well as he succeeded in doing this, he could not make her quite unconscious of the passage of time.

'I thought the steamer crossed in an hour and a half,' she said; 'but we have surely been more than two hours on board.'

'Oh dear no, I think not. There's a good deal of wind to-night, however; so I dare say the passage will take a little longer than usual.

Mrs. Hartfield questioned him about the time more than once after this, but he was unable to give her any definite answer.

It was all right, he said vaguely, and his spirits mounted as the boat plunged gaily through the waters.

With the first gleam of morning they neared the shore. Their luggage was ready for landing among the first, only a couple of carpet bags and a portmanteau, which were pounced upon speedily by officials, and borne off to a building in the distance.

Mr. Comberford led Alice up the steps, and put her at once into a fly that loomed duskily out upon them in the chilly atmosphere. He came back to her presently with the luggage, and seated himself by her side; but before he could rejoin her she had asked the driver the name of the place, and he had told her that she was in Ostend.

She looked at Edgar Comberford with a face full of terror. 'What a wretched mistake!' she said; 'we have come by the wrong steamer. Why did you not tell me the truth on board? But of course we can go from here to Paris. It is only the loss of time that annoys me.'

'My darling Alice, you are as innocent as a baby,' exclaimed Mr. Comberford, with a triumphant

smile. 'We are no more going to Paris than we are going to the moon. All stratagems are fair in love and war. George Hartfield is as well as ever he was in his life, and the little note you so implicitly believed in was only a specimen of imitative penmanship by your humble servant. I wanted to get you away from that dreary old town without *esclandre*, my love. We are bound for the sunny Rhineland, there to forget that there is such a place as Norbury, or such a person as George Hartfield.'

'And you think that I will go with you?'

'My dearest, I do not think you so foolish as to resist your fate. The Rubicon is passed, and return utterly impossible. We gave your husband's old clerk the slip at Dover. He will be in Paris at seven o'clock, with the story of your journey, which will be at once set down as an elopement.'

'I am not so weak or so wicked as you think,' cried Alice, snatching her hand indignantly from his grasp. 'Foolish and guilty as I have been in listening to you, I am not so base as you seem to have thought me. You must take me on to Paris by the first train, Mr. Comberford, or I must go alone.'

'Impossible!'

'Where are we going now?'

'To an hotel. I must get you some breakfast. There is no train for Paris till seven; there is one for Cologne at the same hour, and it is by that we are to travel.'

Alice looked at him in despair. Whatever love she had felt for him died a sudden death in this moment of agony. How gladly would she have welcomed her husband's honest face! How bitterly she reproached herself for her neglect of the old clerk's warning!

'He was my truest friend,' she thought, 'and I refused to listen to him.'

They were at the door of an hotel by this time. While the driver was ringing, a second fly drove up, and an old man alighted. It was Morgan, the clerk.

Alice gave a cry of delight, and called him to the door of the vehicle.

'There has been a mistake,' she said; 'Mr. Comberford brought me by the wrong boat. But, thank Heaven, you came the same way. You can take me on to Paris.'

'Or back to Norbury, whichever you prefer, madam,' answered the old clerk, respectfully. 'Mr. Comberford has an unfortunate habit of making mistakes. This is not the first time he has signed another man's name by mistake. There was an awkward business about a forged accommodation bill, some years ago, which induced Mr. Comberford to cross the Atlantic.'

'What do you mean, sir?' cried the younger man, indignantly.

'I mean that there is no one in the world who knows you better than Bessie Raynor's uncle,' answered William Morgan. 'I never set eyes on your false face till you came into my master's office, but I have heard your history from the lips of a woman who loved you, and who would willingly have made the best of it. You have not changed for the better since your days of poverty, and you have not taken the trouble to ascertain what became of the girl who shared your hardships and disgrace. She is living with me, sir, three miles from Norbury, where you are now so grand a gentleman. I told this lady to beware of you, but she was too confiding to doubt

you, and not confiding enough to believe me. I think, however, you have thrown off the mask too soon.'

'Don't lecture me, sir. The lady must decide between us. Whatever wrong I have done has been done for her sake. I had reason to think she loved me.'

This was said with a tone of bitter reproach, and then the young man stood awaiting his fate with a moody countenance.

'I think I had better take you on to Paris, Mrs. Hartfield,' said the clerk. 'It would set Norbury folks talking if we went straight home. You can tell your husband the whole truth, and he can settle the score with this gentleman.'

'I am going straight on to Germany,' said Mr. Comberford. 'If Hartfield wants me, he must follow me there.'

He walked into the hotel, the door of which had just been opened by a sleepy-looking waiter, leaving Alice under the care of the old clerk. She went to Paris with him, and there made the best story she could to her husband, humbly confessing her own errors.

'I suppose I must have flirted with him a little, George,' she said shyly, 'or he would never have done such a wild wicked thing.'

And this confession had a very good effect upon George Hartfield, who felt that he had been wanting in due care and consideration for his pretty young wife. He withdrew himself from the club at the 'Crown,' left off billiards, and took to rowing Alice on the river in the summer evenings, and reading to her or playing chess with her in the winter. He did not follow Mr. Comberford to Germany, but contented himself with writing a formal letter, relinquishing the conduct of that gentleman's affairs.

Mr. Comberford came back to the Hall three years afterwards, with an aristocratic but by no means agreeable wife. Before returning he took steps to settle a modest annuity upon Mr. Morgan's niece, Bessie Raynor; an annuity which was accepted by the young woman, but the quarterly payments of which were carefully banked against that rainy day when William Morgan should be no more. The old man scorned to touch a penny of Edgar Comberford's money.

MY UNLUCKY FRIEND.

AMONG my fellow-passengers on the overland route from Calcutta there were many of a more lively temperament and social turn than Mr. John Angus Marlow, civil engineer; yet it was curiously to that gentleman I chiefly attached myself during my homeward voyage, some years ago. He was forty years of age, grave—nay, indeed, almost stern of speech and manner, a man whom very few feminine critics would have called handsome, but in whose dark, thoughtful face, deep-set gray eyes, and strongly-marked black eyebrows there was a stamp of intellectual power which no physiognomist could fail to recognize. His professional position was high, and he was commonly reputed a rich man. He was a bachelor, and was now returning to his native country as an invalid, having overtaxed both mind and body

in the cause of a late arduous undertaking in railway construction. I too, a lieutenant in her Majesty's service, was returning home on sick leave, but with very little claim to pity on the score of ill-health, and with most cheerful anticipations of a pleasant holiday among familiar scenes and old friends.

I had met Marlow in society before leaving Calcutta, and, the ice being thus broken between us, our acquaintance quickly ripened into something more than the ordinary companionship of fellow-travellers. He was my senior by fifteen years, and evidently in weak health; so I was pleased to be of use to him in any small matters whereby I might spare him some of the fatigue of the journey, and to defer on all occasions to his humour. I found him very variable in mood, at times silent and thoughtful to an extreme degree, at other times full of pleasant conversation. He had read much and thought much, had a warm appreciation of art, and a refined taste in all matters, but was not a man likely to shine in general society. He grew singularly depressed in manner as we drew nearer the end of our passage; and while we walked the deck of the steamer together

one moonlight night, smoking our cigars in meditative silence, I ventured to make some remark on the subject.

'Gloomy do you think me?' he asked; 'and I dare say you are right. I ought to be glad to see England again, no doubt, but I cannot summon up any sense of pleasure in the anticipation. I have been so long away from—well, I suppose one must call one's birthplace home—that I have lost all interest in the place and its belongings. Those whom I loved are dead. This voyage is altogether a concession to my doctors. I was happy in the pursuit of my profession, and I like India.'

'You must find life rather dismal up the country,' said I, 'as a bachelor.'

'Yes,' he answered, with a faint sigh, 'it is lonely enough; but a man who works as hard as I have done has little time to feel the loneliness of his life.'

'You should marry, and take a wife back to India with you,' I ventured to suggest.

He gave a short laugh as he threw away the end of his cigar.

'I finished with that kind of thing when I was

twenty,' he said. 'I had my dream, and it came to a bad ending. I am not a man to be fooled twice.'

It was late in October when we landed at Southampton. I was engaged to spend the next month in Scotland with a brother officer, but my Christmas was to be passed at my father's house in Warwickshire; and before parting with John Marlow, I extorted from him a promise that he would run down to us for a week at that festive season. He made the promise somewhat unwillingly, though not ungraciously.

'It is very good of you to care for such a dull old fellow as I am, Frank,' he said; and with this we parted.

When my month's sport in Scotland was ended, I hastened home in high spirits and rude health. I found my three sisters—Clara, Georgy, and Jessy—waiting for me at the railway station; three tall blooming damsels, whom I had left some years before in pinafores, short skirts, and scarlet stockings. They were eager to tell me all the home news, and almost bewildered me by their chatter as we drove from the station to the lodge gates.

'We have a new governess, Frank,' said Clara, when they had informed me of all the births, deaths, and marriages, and engagements to marry among our friends and neighbours; 'poor old Miss Colby's health gave way at last, and she has taken a dear little cottage in Lord Leigh's model village. So papa insisted on getting some one else to finish us in music and languages, and so on. Miss Lawson, our new governess, is only twenty, just two years older than I, but she is very accomplished, and so pretty. I hope you won't fall in love with her, Frank.'

This I protested was a most improbable contingency; but I was not the less curious to see the lady in question.

'You will have plenty of her society,' said Georgy; 'she is always with us. Papa likes her amazingly.'

As my father had been ten years a widower, I suggested that this liking on his part might be dangerous; but the three girls indignantly repudiated the idea, and I was content to defer to their judgment.

When we assembled in the drawing-room before dinner, I found Miss Lawson talking to Georgy in one of the windows, and I had some few minutes' leisure in which to observe her before my sister beckoned me across the room in order to present me to the stranger. She was a tall aristocratic-looking girl, with a perfect profile, dark-brown hair, hazel eyes, and a singularly pale complexion; a girl whom no one could fail to observe and admire, but about whose beauty there might nevertheless be some difference of opinion. When I had been talking to her for some minutes her expression struck me as not altogether agreeable. Her lips were too thin for my notion of feminine beauty, and her chin was too prominent. Her eyes were perfect in colour, but I thought them somewhat wanting in depth and softness. Not long, however, did I remain critical upon the subject of Miss Lawson's beauty. There was a charm about her voice and manner not easily to be resisted by a man of my age; and when I retired to my room that night I had no feeling but unqualified admiration for my sisters' governess.

I told them next day of the invitation I had given Mr. Marlow, and his acceptance thereof.

'I wish he might take a fancy to you, Clara,' I said, laughing. 'It would be a capital match. John Marlow is one of the best fellows I ever met, and a rich man into the bargain.'

'And forty years of age, as you admitted just now,' exclaimed Clara, indignantly. 'I am not so desperately in want of offers, Mr. Frank, nor so mercenary as to care for your friend's money.'

Miss Lawson looked up from a water-coloured sketch which she was finishing for Georgy.

'Mr. John Marlow,' she repeated; 'my mother once knew a gentleman of that name. Do you know if he comes from Hadleigh Court, Lincolnshire?'

'Yes, Miss Lawson. He owns a place of that name, I believe. Have you ever seen him?'

'Oh dear no! He went to India before I was born. I have heard my mother speak of him. That is all I know of the gentleman.'

Christmas came, and with it several visitors; amongst them John Marlow. He had improved in

health; but his quiet manners seemed more than usually quiet when compared with the somewhat boisterous gaiety of our country friends, whose high spirits had never been subdued by hard work or Oriental sunshine. My sisters voted him the dullest of bachelors, and declared that his society was absolutely depressing.

'There must be some melancholy secret connected with the poor man's early life,' said Clara; 'and I believe Margaret Lawson knows all about it. You should have seen his face when I introduced him to her, Frank. He started as if he had seen a ghost, but said nothing, and seemed quite glad to get away from her after a few formal sentences about the weather, and so on.'

This was on the morning after my friend's arrival. I watched his movements in the drawing-room that evening, and saw that he studiously avoided Miss Lawson's society, devoting himself chiefly to my sister Clara, who seemed on this occasion to find him by no means dull or disagreeable.

We smoked our cigars together that night on a terrace outside the drawing-room windows, when the

rest of our party had retired; and while we were doing so John Marlow astonished me by saying,—

'Should you be very angry, Frank, if I brought my visit to an abrupt close, and left you to-morrow morning by an early train?'

'I should be very sorry,' I replied. 'But what on earth should induce you to run away from us like that?'

'A kind of panic, Frank. You will laugh at me for my folly. I told you I had had my dream, and that it came to a bad end. I never thought to be reminded of that bitter ending as I have been since I came into this house. It's no use trying to keep my secret from you, Frank. Your sister's governess, Miss Lawson, is the daughter and the living image of the only woman I ever loved, the woman who jilted me under circumstances of peculiar heartlessness. I was her junior by a couple of years, and worshipped her with a slavish passion. She made me a foil to another man, and threw me off remorselessly when she had brought him to her feet. She was a girl of good birth and position, but without money. Captain Lawson,

the man she married, was well off, but a dissipated scoundrel, who would have run through a much larger fortune than that which he had inherited from his father's commercial successes. He died early, and left his widow and child dependent on his family, who were not the sort of people to do much for them. She —Florence Lawson, his widow—did not long survive him. The news of her death reached me in India fifteen years ago. I never thought to look upon the face of her daughter.'

'And you would run away from here on this account?'

'Yes, Frank; I am very weak upon this subject. It seems to me as if there was a kind of fatality in my meeting Florence Lawson's daughter. I have laboured so hard to forget that woman, and the harm she inflicted on me. I thought the very memory of my wrongs was blotted from my mind; but the sight of that girl brought the old pain back with all its sharpness. I can't trust myself in her society, Frank. Let me be wise, and leave her.'

I was astonished by this almost childish weakness in such a man as John Marlow, and used my

utmost eloquence to argue him out of his folly. My reasoning prevailed at last, and he consented to remain with us.

We spent the next day in an excursion to Warwick Castle. Miss Lawson was with us; and while we were exploring the fine old rooms, I saw her more than once engaged in conversation with Mr. Marlow; nor did he take any pains to avoid her in the drawing-room that evening.

Several days passed, and John Marlow said no more about leaving us. He was so undemonstrative in his manners as to attract little notice from strangers; but I, who really liked him, watched him closely, and I saw that his attention was given almost exclusively to Margaret Lawson. It seemed to me that he was drawn to her always against his will. He approached her in a kind of half-reluctant manner; but, once by her side, he never quitted her till the evening was ended. She, for her part, appeared to take much interest in his society, and was always ready to sing or play at his request. Of course this did not escape the quick observation of my sisters, and one morning when I

dropped into the schoolroom during Miss Lawson's absence, the subject was discussed among them.

'I dare say she would marry him for the sake of a position,' said Clara. 'She has no prospect except matrimony, and I know she hates a life of dependence on her rich relations, purse-proud, disagreeable people, according to her account of them.'

'I hope she would marry him for his own sake,' I answered; 'I should be sorry for John Marlow if it were otherwise, for I believe him to be a man of very deep feelings.'

'Then he had better steer clear of Margaret Lawson,' said my sister. 'Whatever heart she has to give is bestowed elsewhere. She left her last situation on account of a love affair with the only son of the house, a Mr. Horace Rawdon. His father, Sir Michael Rawdon, was furious against the young man, and sent him abroad on account of the affair. Margaret told me the story with her own lips, and showed me Mr. Rawdon's portrait. He and all his family are as poor as church mice, she told me, but they had great expectations in the matrimonial way for the young man. He might have married his

cousin, the only child of a rich manufacturer, who has a splendid place near Rawdon Park, and who very much wished for an alliance between the two families.'

The first time I found myself alone with him after this conversation I told John Marlow what I had heard from my sister, determined that he should not suffer a second time from a misplaced affection, if any effort of mine could prevent the sacrifice. The effect of my words was much more severe than I had anticipated, and I saw that the grave iron-gray bachelor had been hard hit.

'I must know how far this affair has gone,' he said abruptly. 'I will ask Margaret for an explanation.'

'Will that be fair to my sisters?' I asked. 'Miss Lawson may very justly consider them guilty of a breach of confidence, and she will assuredly think me an arrant snob for talking of her affairs. I should not have broached the subject if you had not expressed a kind of dread of this girl's influence over your mind.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'I did fear her influence, heaven

knows whether wisely or foolishly. I will take care not to commit you or your sisters. But I must know the truth from Margaret's own lips. I have the right of a future husband to question her. The die is cast, Frank. She has promised to be my wife. It is rather rapid work, no doubt; but Miss Lawson's dependent position justified my acting promptly, and no lapse of time could make me love her better than I do. I have urged her to consent to an early marriage, and I hope to marry her from her uncle's house in London before the beginning of Lent. You must not think me a fool for this sudden passion, Frank. This girl brought the memory of my youth back to me, and it is in her power to atone for all the pain her mother inflicted upon me.'

I tried to congratulate him, but it was now my turn to be weakly superstitious, and to perceive a kind of fatality in this affair. The truth of the matter was, that I could not bring myself to believe in Miss Lawson. There was a light in those brilliant hazel eyes that was not the radiance of a candid soul. I watched her closely after this conversation with John Marlow; and although her manner to him

was all that it should have been, I was secretly convinced that she had no real love for her affianced husband.

Whatever explanation arose between the lovers appeared satisfactory to my friend. He told me afterwards that Margaret had behaved with perfect candour. It was true that young Rawdon had made her an offer, but she had never in any manner encouraged his attentions or returned his affection. The affair had reached his father's ears through one of his sisters, Miss Lawson's pupils, and had resulted in his banishment from home; but the heart and mind of the governess had, according to her own account, been utterly unaffected.

My sisters were speedily informed of Miss Lawson's engagement, and were too good-natured to feel anything but pleasure on hearing the news; although, in their eyes, the age of the bridegroom entirely destroyed the romance of the courtship. Clara could not banish the recollection of Horace Rawdon, the absent traveller, who had gone on a trading expedition to the coast of Africa, hoping to enrich himself by that means.

'Margaret ought to have waited for his return,' said my sister. 'I know she was very much in love with him when she first came here, let her say what she will.'

In the second week in January Mr. Marlow left us to return to London in order to make all necessary arrangements for his marriage; but before bidding me good-bye at the station he invited me to join him in town at my earliest convenience. He had lodgings in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly, and ample accommodation for a visitor. Miss Lawson was to leave us a fortnight afterwards to return to her relations, who were eager to receive her now that she was about to make an advantageous marriage. Her uncle, Mr. Samuel Lawson, was a stockbroker, occupying a large, gaudily furnished house at Bayswater.

During the week following Marlow's departure I amused myself by watching Miss Lawson, in the interests of my friend. Every other morning's post brought her a letter from her lover, and several registered packets of jewelry gratified her during the course of the week; nor were Mr. Marlow's gifts by

any means trifling in value. I fancied, however, that she received these tributes very much as a matter of course; and on more than one occasion when she talked to me of my friend it seemed to me that she was more intent on obtaining information as to his position and resources in India than she was interested in my praises of his character and talents.

It was on my last morning at home that the post-bag brought Miss Lawson a foreign letter, the aspect of which caused her evident agitation. She did not open this epistle at the breakfast-table, and I thought that she looked at me somewhat anxiously as she slipped it into her pocket. She knew that I was going to spend the next week with her lover, and perhaps imagined that I should mention this letter.

I found John Marlow in excellent spirits. He was to be married early in March. He had sketched out his honeymoon tour on the Continent, and had taken a pretty furnished house at the West End to receive his young wife and him on their return to London in May.

'I shall give her all the pleasures and gaieties that a woman of her age has a right to enjoy,' he said. 'She shall have no occasion to regret having married a man twenty years her senior.'

'Tell me one thing, Marlow,' I said, seriously. 'You mean this to be a love-match, don't you? You wouldn't marry Margaret Lawson if you believed her influenced by your position and fortune, would you, old fellow?'

'I would not, Frank.'

'So help you heaven?'

'So help me heaven!' he answered as earnestly. 'I believe she loves me, Frank. If I did not think that, I would sooner cut my throat than marry her.'

'There are some men who think love comes after marriage,' I said presently.

'I am not one of those. I have received Margaret Lawson's assurance that she loves me; and I believe her from my soul. Have you anything to say against her, Frank?'

'Oh, nothing,' I replied hastily, rather alarmed by that somewhat tigerish ferocity with which a man over head and ears in love is accustomed to hear the

impeachment of his betrothed. I remembered that foreign letter, and the sudden flush which had overspread Miss Lawson's face as she received it, but I dared not mention the subject to my friend. It seemed so mean a thing to persist in doubting the lady, and the letter might be from any one in the world except that absent traveller, Horace Rawdon. I did, however, doubt this lady's truth almost in spite of myself, and listened to my friend's anticipations of happiness with secret misgiving. My visit to him was prolonged much beyond the week I had intended to devote to it. I dined at Bayswater with the Lawson family—a showy, ceremonial banquet; and I spent a good deal of my time with John Marlow and his affianced at picture galleries, theatres, and other places of entertainment.

I had occasion to cross the park one morning in the direction of Bayswater, on my way to call upon some friends in Hyde Park Gardens; and in one of the lonelier walks I was surprised to meet Miss Lawson. She was quite alone, and seemed, as I thought, not a little embarrassed by meeting me. I

knew that she had refused to attend a morning concert with Mr. Marlow that day, on the plea of particular business in the way of shopping, and was therefore disposed to wonder at finding her strolling idly here. She said something about an atrocious headache, which had obliged her to put off all business, and dismissed me, as I thought, rather impatiently.

My friends were not at home; and I recrossed the park within half an hour by another and longer route, taking the furthermost border of the Serpentine. Here, having no special occupation for the afternoon, I lingered to smoke a cigar, stretched at full length upon a bench by the side of the water. The day was mild for the season of the year, but the gardens were almost deserted at this time. I was roused from my reverie by a man's voice close at hand, saying loudly,—

'If you throw me over, Margaret, you will be as false and heartless a woman as ever breathed the breath of life. You know that I trusted implicitly in your promise to marry me whenever I came home to claim you, and you know that I have broken with

my family for ever in order to be true to you. I might have done well abroad had I been content to wait for success; but I could not endure life away from you, and I availed myself of the first opportunity that arose for my return. I have accepted a clerkship in a merchant's office, with a salary that will just enable us to live. It is no brilliant propect to offer you, Margaret; but it is better than the dependence of your position as a governess, and it is a life to be shared with a man you have professed to love.'

The answer to this speech escaped me. The speaker was walking slowly beside a lady on the other side of the noble horse-chestnut beneath which I was seated, completely screened by the massive trunk from these two promenaders. They walked a little way, and then returned. This time the lady was speaking, and I recognized the clear musical tones of Miss Lawson's voice.

'You know that I have always been true to you, Horace,' she said; 'but it was not the less foolish of you to come home. I was shocked by your imprudence when I received your letter from Marseilles.

Such a step will be sure to aggravate your father, and all your friends.'

'I thought you would be glad of my return Margaret.'

'Of course I am glad to see you; but I am sorry that your prospects should be sacrificed to such foolish impatience. We are both young enough to wait for a few years.'

Not a word of her engagement to John Marlow. They passed the tree again, returned, and then parted within a few paces of my seat.

'May I call upon you at your uncle's?'

'No, Horace; I dare not receive you there. I will write to you in a few days. I have run the risk of all kinds of annoyance in consenting to meet you to-day. My uncle and aunt are strait-laced and severe to a degree. Good-bye.'

'A brief meeting and a cold parting, Margaret. When shall I see you again?'

'Indeed I don't know. I will write to you.'

He kissed her, and let her go, very reluctantly, as it seemed to me in my place of concealment. I rose as Miss Lawson hurried away, and contrived to

meet the gentleman face to face. He was walking slowly along, swinging his cane to and fro, with a very moody countenance. He was a fine young fellow, with a handsome face bronzed by foreign suns.

I went back to my friend's lodgings sorely puzzled as to my line of conduct. It was evident that Margaret Lawson had deceived Marlow as to her relations with Horace Rawdon; but it did not appear to me that she meant to jilt the elder man. I had little doubt that the letter she was to write her old love would contain the intelligence of her approaching marriage with John Marlow. She had shrunk in a cowardly manner from telling young Rawdon a truth which she would not fear to communicate in a letter. It was his anger, not his pain she dreaded.

'She is just what I thought her,' I said to myself,—'selfish and cold-hearted to the last degree. I should dearly love to see her left in the lurch by both her suitors.'

On reflection, I decided that it was best to tell John Marlow the whole truth. He was likely

enough to detest me for my interference; but I was willing to suffer his dislike rather than that he should walk blindfold into a matrimonial snare for lack of fair warning. I found him reading his Indian letters, which the overland mail had just brought him.

'Another bank gone,' he said, 'the Calcutta Imperial.'

'Does that affect you?' I asked, anxiously.

'Personally to the extent of a few hundreds only, but I have many friends who will suffer.'

It struck me that this failure might be turned to some account as a trial of Miss Lawson's truth; but I said nothing about this to Marlow. I only told him, in the simplest manner, what I had heard that afternoon in Kensington Gardens.

John Marlow was deeply moved, but he said very little, and I saw how painfully weak-minded he was upon the subject. We were both to dine at Bayswater on the next evening, and I felt sure that he would take occasion to question his betrothed. He did not wait for the evening, however, but went early the following morning to call on Miss Lawson.

She was out with her aunt and cousins; and he came home looking ill, tired, and depressed. When the evening came he was too ill to dine out; and I went myself to carry his excuses and my own, about an hour before the dinner-hour.

Mr. Lawson was out; and on requesting to see his niece, I was ushered into the library, where the young lady came to me. I told her of Mr. Marlow's illness, and she received the news with evident uneasiness.

'It is very sudden, is it not?' she asked, looking at me in a searching manner.

'Yes, it is sudden. He seems to be suffering from a kind of low fever.'

'My uncle tells me there has been a great bank failure in Calcutta. I hope that does not affect Mr. Marlow?'

'Not to any great extent, I believe,' I replied with assumed hesitation, for I saw the young lady had already taken fright.

'But to some extent it does,' she answered quickly. 'Do you think it is anxiety that has made him ill?'

'He certainly does seem troubled in his mind; but his anxiety may not arise from business matters.'

'From what else could it arise?'

'You would be more likely to know that than I; for I am sure he has no secrets from you.'

'I hope not; I have a right to share his troubles.'

'I am glad to hear you say that,' I replied; 'I should be sorry for him if he were to win only a fair-weather wife.'

Miss Lawson charged me with all manner of affectionate messages for her betrothed, and I departed. My friend's illness lasted for some days, and even after his recovery the fever left him worn and pale.

'Frank,' he said to me on the first morning that we breakfasted together in the sitting-room, 'I am going to offer Miss Lawson her freedom, and I want you to be a witness of our interview. I have thought the subject out during my illness, and I trust I have come to the right way of thinking. I shall make no allusion to the meeting in the gardens, as I do not want to compromise you.'

I accompanied him to Mr. Lawson's house, and

was present throughout a scene which touched me deeply. My friend spoke with a noble simplicity, offering to release his betrothed, and imploring her to withdraw from her engagement unless she could give him her whole heart.

'I am twenty years your senior, Madge,' he said, 'and have nothing but my truth to commend me to you. Let us understand each other before it is too late. Nothing but misery could come to either of us from a loveless union.'

She looked at him with a curiously searching look, and hesitated a little before replying.

'You must have some hidden reason for this formal offer, John,' she said.

'It is not a formal offer; I have no reason but my desire to be secure in the possession of your heart.'

'Have you any cause to doubt me?'

'I cannot answer that question very precisely. There is such a thing as instinctive doubt. I know and feel my own demerits. Our engagement was a hasty one, and I want to give you a fair opportunity for withdrawal before it is too late. I entreat you to

be true to me, Margaret—to me and to yourself. But I do not want to hurry you; take time for reflection; let me see you again to-morrow at this time.'

Mr. Lawson came into the room as we were taking leave, and his niece had an opportunity for speaking to me alone while Mr. Marlow was talking to him.

'Your friend is looking very ill,' she said, anxiously; 'I fear this bank business must be a serious affair.'

'Yes,' I replied, with equal gravity; 'it means ruin—for the losers.'

She had no time to question me further, and I felt assured that her mystification was complete. She attributed her lover's offer entirely to a change in his circumstances, which he was not candid enough to explain.

He had not long to wait for his answer; it came by that evening's post. She had thought earnestly upon the subject, and was convinced that his offer to release her implied a doubt that was incompatible with perfect affection. It was best, therefore, that the

offer should be accepted, and that both should hold themselves free. This reply came upon John Marlow like a thunderclap. In spite of her duplicity with regard to her old engagement, he had to the last believed in Margaret Lawson's love for himself.

'You are right, Frank,' he said; 'I have only exposed myself to a second disappointment. I shall go back to India next month, and leave the ground clear for Horace Rawdon.'

'Whom she will jilt just as she has jilted you,' I replied. 'She will never consent to marry a clerk in a merchant's office; unless, indeed, the prospect of his future baronetcy should tempt her.'

The issue proved my guess correct. Miss Lawson married a merchant-prince whom she had met at her uncle's house, and whose budding attentions, taken in conjunction with the bank failure, had tempted her to the breaking of her engagement. This gentleman failed within six months of his marriage, and fled from his creditors, leaving his wife to exist as best she might on her earnings as a daily governess. This means of subsistence has, however, been augmented of late by an annuity of a hundred pounds

settled on her by an anonymous benefactor, whose name I know to be John Angus Marlow. My friend returned to India, where he is now an eminently prosperous man, but a confirmed bachelor, happy in the pursuit of his profession, and with no thought beyond it.

THE END.

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